

BUTLER, JOSEPH DAIN, Ed.D. Discovering Strategies of Support to Build Distinguished School Executives. (2012)
Directed by Dr. Carl Lashley. 151 pp.

According to Reeves (2006), “the demands of leadership almost invariably exceed the capacity of a single person to meet the needs at hand” (p. 32). This research study intended to identify challenges that school administrators face in their profession and how school district leaders can offer supportive strategies to alleviate these obstacles. Through a qualitative approach, interviews with school principals and district administrators in one school system were carried out to discover trend data that would validate the commonalities of principals’ needs and describe potential solutions for district staff to implement.

This research was specifically linked to the North Carolina School Executive Standards (SES) adopted by the State Board of Education as the new evaluation tool for school administrators. The seven leadership standards outlined in the SES served as a guide during interviews and prompted discussion in each function to determine the supportive mechanisms needed to build capacity for distinguished school executives. The purpose of this study was to benefit the thoughtful process of evaluation that will be required by districts in order to meet the expectations of the new evaluation model. The study should also contribute to the ongoing efforts of other scholarly works that attempt to identify the complexities of the principalship and the need for sustainable support.

DISCOVERING STRATEGIES OF SUPPORT TO BUILD
DISTINGUISHED SCHOOL EXECUTIVES

by

Joseph Dain Butler

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2012

Approved by

Committee Chair

To Joseph Beau and Carolyn Blue

My inspiration to finish . . .

“You ain’t gonna learn what you don’t wanna know”

-Bob Weir, John Perry Barlow

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My best chosen friend, companion, guide, to walk through life, linked hand-in-hand, two equal, loving friends, true husband and true wife.

-- Sir Charles Gavan Duffy

My wife, Brie is to be credited for my success in not only the field of education, but the field of life. She has always stood beside me rather than behind me and in some instances, has taken the lead when I needed her most. Brie exemplifies the meaning of resilience through her continual commitment to her work as an educational leader, as a mother, and as a spouse. She has set the pace for our family to truly understand what it means to live a fulfilled life.

I will be forever grateful to my wife for the patience, support, and empathy she gave me throughout this challenging process. Life is a balancing act that can easily tilt in directions we don't always intend. Through the years of work, writing, and welcoming the arrival of our two beautiful children, Brie has always kept me level and pushed me to successful arenas in life that I never imagined possible. As I reach this milestone, I extend my endless gratitude to her support and my promise to do the same for her as she continues to strive for excellence in all walks of life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT	1
Statement of Problem.....	3
Overview of School Executive Standards.....	4
Purpose of the Study	6
District Challenges.....	8
Significance.....	9
Overview of Subsequent Chapters.....	10
Chapter II	10
Chapter III.....	10
Chapter IV.....	11
Chapter V	12
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Review of Related Research	14
The Wallace Foundation	15
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning	19
Southern Regional Education Board.....	21
Charlotte Advocates for Education.....	25
Maryland State Board of Education.....	29
Philosophical Foundations	30
The Seven Leadership Functions	34
Instructional Leadership.....	35
Cultural Leadership.....	36
Human Resource Leadership	38
Managerial Leadership.....	39
External Development Leadership.....	40
Micropolitical Leadership	40
Building Leadership Capacity.....	41
Clarification of Expectations	43
Framework of the SES Evaluation Process	44

Supportive Research	46
Supportive Leadership Practices	46
Implications for the School Executive Standards	58
Standards-driven Evaluation Systems	60
Implications for the SES Evaluation Process	61
Summary of Literature Review	63
III. METHODOLOGY	66
Research Questions	69
Description of the Methodology	70
Justification of Research from Literature	73
Limitations	81
IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS	82
Strategic Leadership	85
Instructional Leadership	91
Cultural Leadership	97
Human Resource Leadership	101
Managerial Leadership	105
External Development Leadership	108
Micro-political Leadership	112
The Evaluation Process	115
Summary of Findings	117
V. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS	120
Research Questions	121
Overview of Implications	122
Proficient vs. Distinguished—Clarification of	
Performance Ratings	125
Professional Development by Standard	127
Individualized Support	129
Focus on Student Achievement	132
Formality vs. Informality—The Evaluation Process	134
Communication of Responses	135
Alignment of District Support	136
Conclusion	138
Future Research	138
REFERENCES	140

APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANT VISUAL OF SCHOOL EXECUTIVE STANDARDS.....	144
APPENDIX B. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL EVALUATION PROCESS	146
APPENDIX C. PRINCIPAL AND CENTRAL OFFICE INTERVIEW MATRICES	148

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Categories of Identified Effective Strategies	27
Table 2. NCSBE Core Evaluative Components of the School Executive Standards.....	32
Table 3. Participants and Affiliations	83

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Research Procedure	13
Figure 2. Seven Functions of Leadership as Developed by Interview Questions and School Priorities	17
Figure 3. The 21 Responsibilities of the Balanced Leadership Model	21
Figure 4. Maryland Instructional Leadership Outcomes	30
Figure 5. Conceptual Framework	64
Figure 6. Conceptual Framework with Research Questions.....	71
Figure 7. Correlation of Research Procedures and Findings	76
Figure 8. McRel's Balanced Leadership Framework	134

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The North Carolina School Executive Standards were adopted by the State Board of Education in 2006 and currently serve as the foundation for principal effectiveness within all public schools. These standards encompass a variety of leadership responsibilities that places priority on student achievement and collaborative administrative practices. Principals are given the task of becoming distinguished leaders within each executive function. As with any formal evaluation, the School Executive Standards (SES) determine a principal's documented success and areas that must be improved.

When the United States Secretary of Education was asked to describe the role principals have in improving student achievement, Arne Duncan (2011) stated,

Nothing is more important. There's no such thing as a high-performing school without a great principal. It is impossible. You simply can't overstate their importance in driving student achievement, in attracting and retaining great talent to the school. . . . Principal leadership is so critically important, and we want to support principals as they grow and develop. We want to do everything we can to help those great leaders at the local level make a difference in their communities. (NAESP)

It is evident that principals are viewed as critical factors to their school's success and it is just as clear that many challenges can stand in the way of academic improvement. An adoption of new executive standards in North Carolina is certainly a sign of the increased

expectations for principal performance that comes with the need for continued support from all levels of the profession. As federal, state, and local accountability requirements demand stronger student output, strategies to provide the capacity for principals to lead is also needed.

According to West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010), “principals typically exert limited control over phenomena ranging from consistent demands to high-intensity events. This situation generates formidable pressures because a single episode can place organization and personnel under significant duress” (p. 246). The current state of the principalship requires a school leader to handle daily affairs while simultaneously staying focused on the strategic plan for continual success. It should be noted that long-term improvements are not limited to academic growth, but also include the progression of the school’s culture, quality of teaching, infusion with the school community, and the efficient use of resources to name a few. As the North Carolina School Executive Standards clearly reveal, there are numerous leadership components that must be exhibited at high levels by principals in order to be distinguished in their field.

As performance standards rise and potential barriers come into the principals’ view while trying to advance their schools, policy makers have attempted to provide a concise layout of leadership expectations. The North Carolina State Board of Education (2008), has set a new mission that,

requires a new vision of school leadership and dictates the need for a new type of school leader—an executive instead of an administrator. No longer are school leaders just maintaining the status quo by managing complex organizations. Like their colleagues in business, they must be able to create schools as organizations that can learn and change quickly if they are to improve performance. (p. 1)

As a current central office administrator, I had particular interest in understanding the new North Carolina School Executive Standards. Furthermore, I also wished to determine what support structures could be created and sustained in order for principals to more appropriately meet the expectations set forth. A critical component of my professional responsibilities was the offer of support to principals that will assist them in instructional improvement. Since the standards required principals to provide a setting that academically progresses students and professionally develops teachers as leaders, it was imperative that I understand the standards and devise supportive strategies that will benefit principals throughout this process.

As I explored effective strategies that district level administrators can implement, my research and field work was carefully crafted. A significant impact potentially existed that could assist in the reframing of interactions between principals and district administrators. This topic encompasses all administrative teams throughout the state as each school system strives to reach the goals of the North Carolina School Executive Standards.

Statement of Problem

Principals in North Carolina have been assigned the task of becoming distinguished school leaders in the seven leadership functions that encompass all core responsibilities in administrative leadership (NCSBE, 2006). The purpose of this study is to discover what types of support principals will need to meet the expectations embedded in the School Executive Standards. Additionally, this study will investigate how district administration can offer support to school principals as they attempt to demonstrate

competence and eventually master each leadership function. The functions include instructional, cultural, managerial, human resource, strategic, external development, and micro-political strands of leadership. It is my intention to establish a baseline of supportive strategies that central office personnel can utilize and sustain throughout their interactions with building level administrators.

This task can be problematic considering the diverse nature of the principalship as well as the dynamic culture of a school and school district. No two schools are identical and principals vary in leadership styles. School districts have a range of mission statements and expectations for principals. Values and areas of commitment can quickly shift as superintendents retire and a new regime begins. Nevertheless, the North Carolina School Executive Standards call for mastery in seven specific leadership strands by all principals in every district throughout the state. Careful thought and research should be given to the process of support in order to encompass the many differences in leadership styles that must all be directed to a mastery level of success.

Overview of School Executive Standards

The North Carolina School Executive Standards consist of seven leadership functions that span the many responsibilities of principals. The functions include strategic, instructional, cultural, human resource, managerial, external development, and micro-political strands of leadership. Principals are evaluated in each of the seven areas by the superintendent or a designee each academic year. School leaders earn one of four performance standards in each strand that cover a scale of developing, proficient, accomplished, and distinguished.

While each leadership function is thoroughly described at each level of performance rating with specific actions that a principal should put in place, there are generalities that cover the spectrum of the standards that should be discussed for initial understanding. The seven leadership strands encompass the work of a principal through long-term planning, being the instructional leader, providing a collaborative setting, maintaining high quality staff, managing resources, securing support from the community, and facilitating shared decision making among all stakeholders. Although these tasks are quite unique, a commonality of traits that are needed to be distinguished in all areas can surface from the standards.

Principals are considered to be at the highest rating in each standard when labeled distinguished. Performance indicators for this ranking require principals to do far more than understand and be aware of what is expected as noted in the developing rating. The progression from developing to proficient indicates that a principal is able to go beyond understanding his or her responsibilities and create a systematic plan to implement each leadership strategy. Accomplished principals are considered to have mastered the implementation of their ideas as shown through artifacts of their work. This would include School improvement Plans, Teacher Working Conditions Surveys, and student test scores to name a few. Distinguished principals are expected to surpass the initial implementation mode by building teacher leader capacity for further implementation through shared leadership. The principal becomes a facilitator of best practices at this level and ensures the fidelity of the school's work that has been collaboratively established.

Purpose of the Study

Historically, public schools have experienced many initiatives put into play by federal, state and local mandates. It is common to find new expectations for students and faculty as school systems continue to push for more rigorous curricula and more successful student outcomes. While the intentions have been undoubtedly to benefit the achievement of schools, the inner workings of the school structure have deteriorated along the way. Cuban (1988) authored *The Managerial Imperative and the Practice of Leadership in Schools*. He expressed:

The unintentional transformation of school communities into contentious factions over the last century has diminished a shared sense of purpose, replacing it with suspicion, antagonism, and a heightened sense of self-interest rather than a nurturing of the public good. (p. xvi)

It is evident from a review of relevant literature that well-documented expectations for principals exist in public schools. Specifically, the North Carolina School Executive Standards call for leadership performance ranging from developing, proficient, and accomplished with an end goal of distinguished marks throughout seven core leadership functions. A primary goal of improvement in student achievement echoes across all functions and challenges principals to work collaboratively with teachers, parents, students, and members of the community to accomplish this forbearing task. Strategies, artifacts, and leadership qualities are all clearly stated in the SES document that serves as the new “handbook” for principals to follow.

What has not been as clearly documented is a strategic plan that school districts can implement that will navigate principals through the performance levels SES

standards in order to become distinguished school executives. While many research teams have generated recommendations for districts to consider, most of the literature has exposed what is currently not working in regards to principal support from the central office. A push for school district transformation has emerged that will only occur with further exploration of what can benefit interactions and mechanisms of support between schools and districts. Principals will not be able to manage all tasks independently and should not be expected to do so. As stated by the Southern Regional Education Board (2009) who published “The District Leadership Challenge: Empowering Principals to Improve Teaching and Learning,”

Depending on principals to be superheroes is not a solution to the problem of working conditions that hinder widespread high school reform. While some exceptional principals make progress despite the lack of supportive conditions, many others respond by foregoing attempts to make the complex changes in school and classroom practices that can boost student motivation and achievement. (p. iii)

Current literature has provided a foundation of research related to challenges that district leaders face when supporting and interacting with school principals. From this research, ideas to address this void have been hypothesized and implemented in various school systems. I hope to continue the search for strategies that will strengthen professional and trusting relationships between district and school administrators. If viable means of communication can emerge, all stakeholders within the educational framework can build a capacity for continual school improvement.

District Challenges

District leaders face numerous challenges when supporting and interacting with principals in an effort to advance their leadership abilities. Those in a direct or indirect evaluative role can easily be approached with caution regardless of their genuine effort to provide support. According to Johnson and Chrispeels (2010), a relational linkage must be established between central office and principals. This linkage “seems to mitigate some of the team members’ concerns with administrative directives and to open the door to new learning” (p. 766). The issue of trust must be addressed between both parties through strengthening of relationships.

Just as school principals, central office leaders are typically faced with an overbearing workload. This creates a struggle to manage all assigned task while still addressing the needs of principals in the district. As budget and staffing cuts arise, school leaders are expected to do more with less. Professional development, individualized support, and simply the time to have conversations with one another can quickly be absorbed by a list of tasks that must be mastered. Supervisors at the district level are burdened with this reality that negatively effect relationship building with principals.

The era of accountability under No Child Left Behind has also monopolized the direction of support offered to principals from the district. The race for proficient students to increase year after year has become an obsession due to federal sanctions that demand continual progress in test scores. Certainly, there are many other aspects of the principal’s role than improving student performance. This is easily noted throughout the seven leadership functions of the School Executive Standards. A challenge that surfaces is the

balancing act of support across the spectrum of school leadership. If principals are to become distinguished executives, support from the district must be diverse and encompass the many facets of the principalship. An exacerbated focus on accountability standards may not allow this leadership growth to occur.

Finally, central office administrators are frequently structured to work in silos. A common message of support and focus becomes altered when district leaders experience tunnel vision within their respective departments. Principals must interact with a variety of district leaders depending on the nature of an issue at hand. Offering clear and consistent support to school leaders becomes challenging if a network of planning is not in place between district administrators. Contradictions can arise that feeds distrust among principals as well as a loss of credibility. Certainly, cohesion is essential among those who offer centralized support if principals are to make progress within the School Executive Standards.

Significance

Principals across the state of North Carolina have been challenged to continually develop their leadership skills while being held accountable for instructional and academic improvement. The School Executive Standards clearly define what is expected of principals and what the positive outcomes for success should be. However, plans and strategies of support are left to the district to devise. While there is a wealth of research on the challenges principals face and their lack of preparation that exists, there is a need for a comprehensive plan to provide sustainable support and interventions to principals in the many areas of leadership. I planned to document this need but more importantly,

begin the creation of a systematic support structure that facilitates helpful interactions between district administrators and school principals. This support framework would hopefully serve as a foundation for other educational leaders to expand upon as support for school administrators continues to improve.

Overview of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter II

The study began with a thorough review of the founding documents that were used to create the North Carolina School Executive Standards. These documents provided insight to what current professional organizations, educational advocates, and other boards of education deemed most important for 21st century school executives. An identification of these leadership qualities along with a system to monitor and evaluate principals emerged as a framework for school administrators in North Carolina.

After examining the documents that helped comprise the School Executive Standards, supporting literature was also reviewed to shed light on the challenges that principals face to meet high expectations along with the obstacles that district leaders encounter while trying to help them do so. This research helped determine the focus of my fieldwork and provided guidance to key questions of support that should be investigated. What support do principals need to become distinguished school executives? How can this support be offered from school districts?

Chapter III

Fieldwork in the study focused on a qualitative inquiry approach of one school system in central North Carolina. The system was comparatively average in student

enrollment for the region and above average when compared to the rest of the state. It was located in a rural area that had experienced high levels of unemployment and economic downturn, but had also experienced respectable gains in student achievement. Those involved in interviews ranged from first year principals to tenured administrators. Seven principals and five district staff members were interviewed at length about the new school executive standards regarding how support could be increased and what types of support were needed to meet these expectations.

Each participant that was interviewed was offered a copy of the School Executive Standards as well as the descriptors for each leadership strand. Copies of the actual performance indicators for each rating were also provided. Finally, steps to the recommended evaluation process from start to finish were distributed to each participant. These documents served as reference materials for those interviewed to better describe supportive strategies that were needed to move along the evaluation continuum. Specifically, insight was requested about how principals can emerge as distinguished executives through appropriate channels of support.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and decoded after completion. Excerpts from these discussions were compiled in my research findings to identify trend data that helped to answer the research questions that emerged from the review of literature.

Chapter IV

Findings that indicated the types of support needed from district leaders and how this support could be offered are represented in Chapter IV. Input from principals and central office administrators was compiled and correlated to identify the supportive

mechanisms currently in place and to discover additional strategies of support that could potentially benefit the professional growth of school executives. Research findings were analyzed across the continuum of the School Executive Standards ratings in an attempt to reveal the actions needed to advance principals to distinguished levels.

Chapter V

The final chapter discusses the implications of principal support towards their distinguished performance that was derived from the research findings. Future possibilities of study as well as limitations are presented. An alignment of findings to the relevant literature of principal preparation is also discussed. The research procedure in its entirety is demonstrated in Figure 1.

This process begins with a review of the founding literature used by the North Carolina State Board of Education to create the School Executive Standards. The rationale for its creation and the expectations that are required must be understood prior to devising strategies of support.

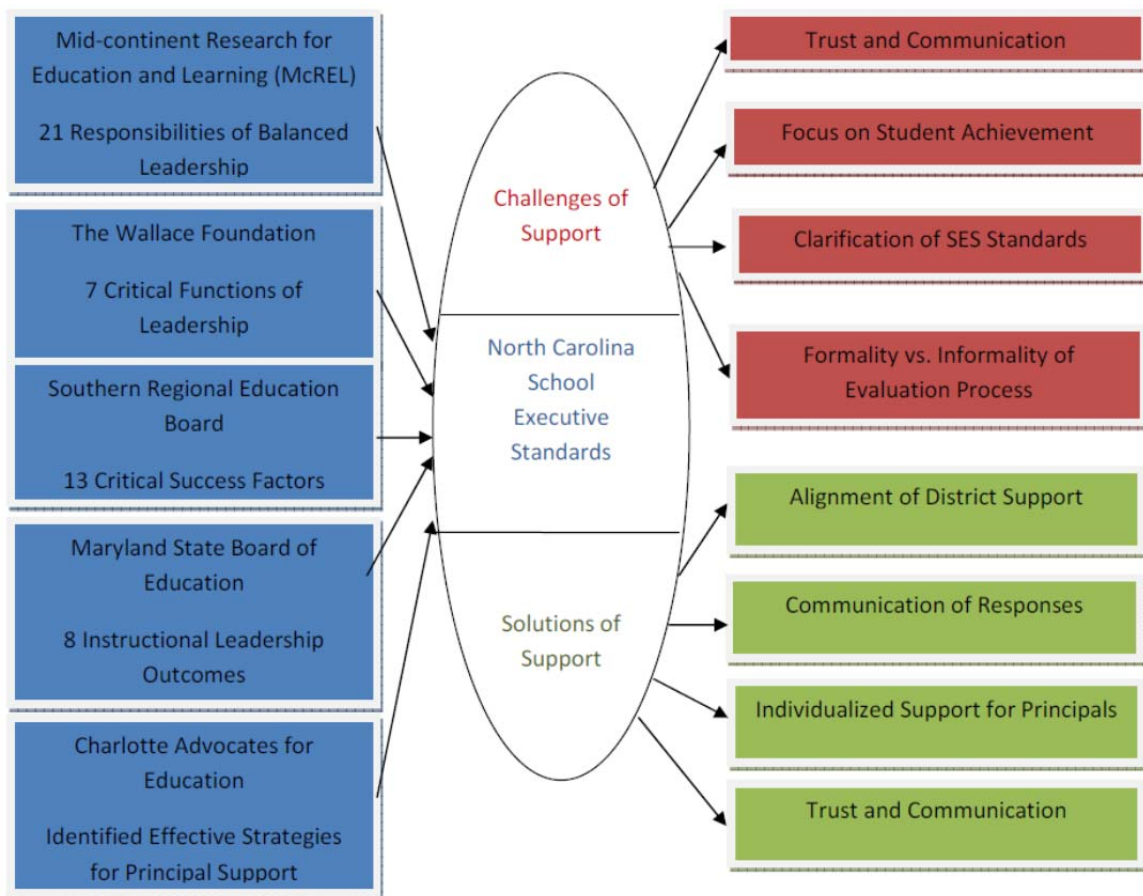


Figure 1. Research Procedure

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Related Research

The North Carolina State Board of Education approved a new vision for school leadership in December, 2006 by adopting the North Carolina Standards for School Executives. Since then, public school administrators have been challenged to understand and practice these standards in the role of the principalship. After ten years of assessment from the ISLLC standards (Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium), North Carolina adopted new executive standards in an attempt to more appropriately identify the skill sets needed by principals in the 21st century learning environment (NCSBE, 2008).

Much conversation has occurred regarding the massive responsibilities and expectations of the principalship. The role requires the ability to continuously multi-task, be the instructional leader, be the motivator for others, operate with a sense of ethics and justice, and be authoritative while collaborative. Principals must set challenging goals for themselves and those around them in order to continually improve student achievement as well as professional development for teachers. Schlechty (2002) stated that “the primary role of a leader is to inspire others to do things they might otherwise not do” (p. XX). The last decade produced research that indicated the leadership profession had become so immense that a re-visitation of professional priorities was needed. Organizations such as the Wallace Foundation and McREL (Mid-continent Research for

Education and Learning) have been on the forefront of fieldwork that sparked many educational systems to consider leadership reform.

The North Carolina State Board of Education followed the work of these organizations as well as others to determine what change, if any, needed to occur regarding appropriate assessment of school principals. A review of these interactions and research findings expose the history and development of the North Carolina School Executive Standards.

The Wallace Foundation

The Wallace Foundation seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that will strengthen education leadership, arts participation, and out-of-school learning (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). Founded more than 50 years ago, the charitable organization has worked with a variety of educational organizations to strengthen leadership practices. Portin et al. (2003), who headed research for the organization, explained that the *Leaders Count* initiative was established more than a decade ago by the Wallace Foundation to “discover ways school leaders can improve student achievement and to create the conditions necessary to allow those leaders to succeed” (p. 1).

Portin et al. worked closely with the Wallace Foundation to uncover the skills needed to survive as a principal. *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A National Study of the Principals*, was written in 2003. His team found that there is no easy answer to what qualities are needed to run a school. Skill sets can change from day to day and from school setting to school setting. While the end result was a prescribed list of standards

that principals must be able to accomplish, their research proposed that many expectations under the ISLLC standards were no longer reasonable goals to set for current principals. While supported in theory, Portin et al. (2003) believed that the ISLLC standards frequently focused on what principals *should* be able to do rather than the core responsibilities that principals *must* be able to do. According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2008), the ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) Standards expected school administrators to facilitate the “development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders” (p. 1).

Specifically, Portin et al. (2003) desired more knowledge about what principals really needed to know at the core level of the profession. Portin’s team worked with educators in 21 different schools in four different states. The research team primarily used a case study approach that heavily relied on qualitative analysis. Close attention was given to how principals viewed their “preparation and initiation into school leadership” (p. 51). Schools selected were all identified as having complex issues that school leaders faced, such as instructional practices, retention, and facility issues. Identical questions were asked to each principal while all support staff were asked the same questions related to their leadership roles in the school. All responses were transcribed, coded, and listed in spreadsheets for trend data to be displayed. Questions were all open-ended and focused on discovering what tasks are present within a school, how these tasks are accomplished, who completes these tasks, what outside support is received, and what induction, if any, prepared the principals to handle school leadership. Questions also revealed the major

challenges that the school organization faced, such as providing instructional alignment, retaining qualified staff, maintaining a positive culture, and balancing staff interests with those of parents and community members.

Portin et al. (2003) concluded three key findings. “First, not every school needs the same kind of leadership. Second, not every school is the right place for anyone nominally qualified to be a principal. Finally, the rules under which principals act matter a great deal” (p. 8). Leadership priorities varied from school to school in the study. It was evident that no clear answer emerged to the question; “What does it take to run a school?” Rather than a specific list of qualities, interview answers and school priorities were used to develop seven functions of leadership that encompass the many responsibilities of a school principal.

Critical Function
Instructional Leadership
Cultural Leadership
Managerial Leadership
Human Resource Leadership
Strategic Leadership
External Development Leadership
Micropolitical Leadership

Figure 2. Seven Functions of Leadership as Developed by Interview Questions and School Priorities

Regardless of the type of school, Portin et al.’s study concluded that every school needed leadership in the seven areas referenced in the chart. No matter if the principal

performed the duty or if someone else was in charge of the action, these areas of the school environment must be addressed as core priorities. Portin et al. (2003) stated, “Principals are responsible for ensuring that leadership happens in all seven critical areas, but they don’t have to provide it on their own” (p. 25).

The Wallace Foundation supported Portin et al.’s conclusion that the seven core functions of leadership should be facilitated in every school, regardless of the setting or the needs. With this support came critique of the ISLLC standards and whether they had become obsolete for 21st century schools. As mentioned, Portin et al. (2003) used these as a baseline of principals’ responsibilities but deemed the ISLLC standards to be a less than accurate assessment tool for the role of the principalship. These skills became the framework of the seven leadership functions.

Similar research was compiled from the McREL organization in the early 2000’s that aligned with the Wallace Foundation’s call for revised principal standards. The ISLLC standards were viewed to provide a broad list of expectations for principals that lacked a strategic focus on core leadership responsibilities. A potential moral and ethical dilemma surfaced when consideration was given to move away from the ISLLC standards. Specifying job responsibilities to seven leadership functions risked a possible over-emphasis on instructional improvement and a lack of attention towards other components of leadership. Furthermore, a specific leadership action plan could limit a principal’s autonomy to determine what his or her individual school community should prioritize. Thomas Greenfield (1993) called for reform in educational administration in

the 1970's and stressed the importance of school leaders responding to the needs of their communities.

In a profession of administration based upon organizational science, the task of the administrator is to bring people and organizations together in a fruitful and satisfying union . . . in doing so, the work of the administrator carries the justification of the larger social order. (p. 2)

Nevertheless, educational leaders in numerous states agreed that change was needed when establishing the core responsibilities of site-based administrators.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

The McREL organization complemented the 2003 Wallace Foundation's study with research that documented a substantial relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) proposed 21 core leadership responsibilities that directly impacted student progress in *Balanced Leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. McREL began its research process with a meta-analysis of 70 studies that focused on quantitative student achievement data and teacher perceptions of school leadership. Approximately 2,900 schools, 14,000 teachers and more than 1 million students were represented in the 70 studies McREL chose to synthesize. Within the study, 21 core leadership responsibilities were identified as essential qualities that all principals should exhibit. McREL relayed these qualities to past quantitative research that determined effects on instruction. A combination of this data created mathematical trends that linked each leadership responsibility to student achievement. McREL concluded that each

responsibility, if carried out successfully by the principal, will have a positive quantitative impact on student performance.

Standard deviations were used to mathematically express relationships between leadership qualities and increase in student performance. The method used to correlate this data involved tracking student achievement results and linking these results to appropriate leadership strategies used by principals. While theoretical, this methodological approach is grounded in substantial quantitative data collected over three decades. By ranking principals by percentiles regarding the twenty-one leadership qualities, McREL was able to represent movements in student achievement as leadership skills improved or declined.

Meta-analysis research indicated a positive impact on students' academic gains when the documented leadership responsibilities were in place. McREL referred to these responsibilities as a balanced leadership framework. Combined with an extensive literature review of leadership practices, the following 21 responsibilities comprise the balanced leadership model (see Figure 3). Dr. Waters and his team (2003) deemed these to positively affect student achievement when consistently in place. Specifically, each responsibility has leadership practices that, if in place, will foster the change needed to promote student achievement.

The Leadership We Need: Using Research to Strengthen the Use of Standards for Administrator Preparation and Licensure Programs was published by McREL in 2004 and was also written by Dr. Tim Waters in conjunction with Dr. Sally Grubb. Their research continued to relay the message that change was needed in order to more

appropriately evaluate school principals. The ISLLC standards being used to do so did not account for various responsibilities that McREL documented to be necessary if principals were to positively impact student achievement.

Culture	Order	Discipline	Resources	Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment	Focus	Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment
Visibility	Contingent Rewards	Communication	Outreach	Input	Affirmation	Relationship
Change Agent	Optimizer	Ideas/Beliefs	Monitors/ Evaluates	Flexibility	Situational Awareness	Intellectual Stimulation

Figure 3. The 21 Responsibilities of the Balanced Leadership Model

Again, current research found flaws in the ISLLC standards and called for a movement towards identified responsibilities that principals should act upon to promote student progress. A prescribed method of principal assessment was emerging that specifically identified strands of leadership, the responsibilities each entailed, and the actions needed to be carried out to elicit positive change.

Southern Regional Education Board

Another study that influenced the North Carolina State Board of Education to adopt the new Executive Standards was released in 2001 by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). *The Principal Internship: How Can We Get it Right?* identified 13 critical success factors that a successful principal must possess. The SREB intended to collect descriptive data through two-part surveys given to 61 department heads of universities that had active school leadership preparation programs. A disconnect was thought to be present between how principals are prepared for their jobs at the university

setting and what is actually expected from them once entering the role. Four primary questions were used by the SREB (2001) to develop the surveys.

Are educational leadership programs providing internships for future school leaders that develop competencies essential for improving schools and raising student achievement?

Do the leadership preparation programs equip aspiring principals with the knowledge and skills needed to perform the leadership functions and tasks required on the job?

Are universities and school districts working together to provide a well-structured, well-supervised internship program for aspiring principals?
Are universities conducting rigorous evaluations of aspiring principals' performance during the internships? (p. 11)

Part one of the survey focused on essential competencies that principals should acquire prior to completing an educational leadership program. Department heads were asked questions that linked to preparation through students' opportunities to observe in schools and lead or participate in school-based activities that would help to develop these competencies. Department heads could answer NR: Not Required, O: Observing, P: Participating, or L: Leading as responses to questions. List of potential activities that principals should have experienced in their preparation programs were listed with the opportunity for these codes to be used separately or in combination.

Part two of the SREB (2001) survey "probed the perceptions of leadership department heads about key features of their programs":

The degree to which the coursework in the program prepares aspiring principals to perform the responsibilities and tasks required by the job

The degree of collaboration between the university leadership program and local school districts and the amount of structure and supervision given to internships

The degree to which rigorous evaluations of aspiring principals' performance are conducted during their internships. (p. 13)

The SREB survey gathered quantitative data that revealed a disconnect between educational leadership programs and what is required on principals in the actual leadership role. This methodology allowed consistent samples of activities to be listed for department heads to rate with set coding procedures. Numerical averages were obtained to establish summarized findings regarding the effects of the principal internship. SREB expressed concern that prospective principals were not receiving adequate experiences prior to the position and therefore, were unaware of the skill sets needed to become an effective leader. The organization also listed responsibilities of all educational fields that would be needed to establish consistent assessment and evaluation processes throughout the southern region. According to the SREB (2001), State Boards and Departments of Instruction were challenged to revise their current standards for educational leaders in order to find commonalities that could be agreed upon from state to state.

Assign to the state the responsibility for developing uniform procedures to measure an intern's performance, using the state's own adopted standards. This means allocating the time, effort and resources necessary to develop performance evaluation systems *that stand up to the rigorous standards of reliability and validity required for professional licensing*. Comparisons of leadership standards adopted by different states in the SREB region show significant commonalities. Forming a consortium of states to pool resources and develop a common set of standards and a shared internship assessment system would conserve resources, facilitate the completion of a sound assessment design, and promote licensing reciprocity among states. (p. 9)

The following expectations were set forth by the SREB as a guideline for states to use when rethinking standards for current and prospective principals.

Create a focused mission to improve student achievement and a vision of the elements of school, curriculum and instructional practices that make higher achievement possible.

Set high expectations for all students to learn higher-level content.

Recognize and encourage implementation of good instructional practices that motivate and increase student achievement.

Know how to lead the creation of a school organization where faculty and staff understand that every student counts and where every student has the support of a caring adult.

Use data to initiate and continue improvement in school and classroom practices and student achievement.

Keep everyone informed and focused on student achievement.

Make parents partners in their student's education and create a structure for parent and educator collaboration.

Understand the change process and have the leadership and facilitation skills to manage it effectively.

Understand how adults learn and know how to advance meaningful change through quality sustained professional development that benefits students.

Use and organize time in innovative ways to meet the goals and objectives of school improvement.

Acquire and use resources wisely.

Obtain support from the central office and from community and parent leaders for their school improvement agenda.

Continually learn and seek out colleagues who keep them abreast of new research and proven practices. (p. 4)

Similar to the research conducted by the Wallace Foundation and McREL, the SREB called for educational leadership standards that focused on increased academic achievement, realistic measurable goals, and shared leadership practices within the school. Specific action statements evolved out of these studies along with specific leadership strands each action fit in. Again, prescriptive leadership and evaluation emerged as a common thread in research studies as the organizations revealed the need for more tangible leadership assessment.

Charlotte Advocates for Education

The North Carolina State Board of Education also paid close attention to the Charlotte Advocates for Education (CAE) when considering new standards for principal evaluation. The organization is based in Charlotte, North Carolina and released *Role of Principal Leadership in Increasing Teacher Retention: Creating a Supportive Environment* in February, 2004. This executive summary explained the link between teacher turnover and deficits in instructional quality within a school. Approximately \$11,500 was lost each time a teacher needed to be replaced within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS). Furthermore, the study emphasized the impact of strategic principal leadership on reversing the 15-20% teacher turnover trend that occurred yearly within CMS.

The project targeted research towards relationships between principals and their teachers as well as with the culture that existed within the school. Specific questions generated from the CAE (2004) included:

What specific skills, training, experiences, and characteristics affect a principal's ability to be an effective leader who creates as supportive environment?

What specific strategies have principals implemented to impact the shaping of the working and learning environment in their schools?

What support can be provided to principals in becoming more effective—including training and continual professional development? (p. 1)

The research methodology used included administering a survey to 20 identified principals who served the school system. The survey gathered background information pertaining to principal training and general work experience. Core questions asked each principal to relate a list of preparation components to its effectiveness to their current role as principal. A score of 4 indicated a very important effect on their job while 1 signaled no importance or effect. Principals were also asked to complete the Teachers' Working Conditions Survey that North Carolina releases for school staff to provide input on administrative performance. Principals were instructed to indicate what they have accomplished to support teachers and to list the strategies they used to do so.

After the completion of the survey, all principal participants were invited to a focus group to discuss their preparation in the profession, strategies used to empower teachers, and what support they needed to better implement to retain high quality teachers. Based on the collected data from the surveys and guided discussion, the CAE (2004) compiled trend data to release a "next steps" list for the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools to consider when improving teacher retention rates. Part of these recommendations included intensified support for principals regarding induction and staff

development to ensure leadership qualities are in place that will benefit teacher loyalty to the system.

The CAE proposed that principals who were successfully able to retain teachers exhibited many characteristics of successful entrepreneurs. They excelled at problem-solving, took risks, and were visionaries in terms of setting goals for the school community to accomplish. These principals also valued teachers as individuals and were in tune to their needs. Also, these school leaders understood the required balance that must be present between instructional, strategic, and operational leadership. These administrators also valued continual professional development for their staff as well as themselves.

Strategies proposed by the focus groups under the guidance of the Charlotte Advocates for Education are shown in Table 1. These categories list explicit actions that school administrators should implement in an attempt to support and retain staff members. Each category is deemed a vital leadership responsibility that affects the relationship between a principal and staff member.

Table 1

Categories of Identified Effective Strategies

Category	Actions
Use of Time	Provide teachers with time set aside specifically to collaborate with other highly effective teachers*
	Provide every teacher with a daily individual planning time within the school day*
	Have team meetings*

Table 1 (cont.)

Category	Actions
Facilities and Resources	Use of personnel to provide teachers with additional human resources supporting classroom instruction [*]
	Involve teachers in determining resource needs and allocation
	Implement specific strategies to assist teachers without a traditional classroom
Leadership	Create goals, objectives, and priorities for school and actively maintain urgency in meeting them
	Provide each staff member with the standards and expectations you have for them
	Create and/or actively maintain a vision for the school that is supported by the staff and the parents
	Informally visit classrooms of new teachers
Empowering Teachers	Involve teachers in meaningful decision-making [*]
	Provide ways for teachers to be recognized for a job well done—both formally and informally [*]
	Establish teacher leadership positions (e.g. lead teacher, mentor, team leaders, representatives to key district committees) [*]
Professional Development	Provide additional training or opportunities for those teachers identified as potential leaders [*]
	Provide opportunity for teachers to visit other classrooms—both within school and at other schools [*]
	Provide specific opportunities within the school for teachers to learn continually (e.g. peer coaching, study groups) [*]

Table 1 (cont.)

Category	Actions
New Teacher Support	Provide all new teachers with an effective mentor [*]
	Have special orientation for new teachers prior to the opening of school in your school
	Provide opportunity for the new teacher and mentor to work together during the school day—both inside and outside the classroom
Instructional Leadership	Assist teachers in knowing how as a team to develop an assessment system that analyzes student achievement, develops appropriate instructional assignments, and assesses whether these assignments have produced changes in student achievement
	Tap into expertise of experienced teachers or district resources to guide teachers
	Hold faculty meetings for educational instruction purposes
	Personally provide one-on-one guidance and assistance to teachers enabling them continually to improve instruction and student learning

^{*} Over 50% of the 16 principals completing the survey indicated this strategy as one of the most effective strategies within the category (CAE, 2004, p. 12).

Maryland State Board of Education

The North Carolina Board of Education watched closely in 2005 as the Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) adopted its Instructional Leadership Framework. With the mission to “build the instructional leadership capacity of present and potential school leaders in the content and skills needed to increase student achievement” (p. 1), the MSBE embraced numerous foundation documents that guided the adoption process. McREL’s meta-analysis study, and the Southern Regional Education Board’s study of

critical leadership factors, both served as reference documents and provided methodology for reaching the mission of the MSBE.

The Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework hoped to not only drive instructional leadership, but also spark professional development opportunities, offer self-assessment tools to principals, and create dialogue between administrators throughout school districts. Eight specific outcomes for instructional leadership were designed that served as a catalyst to reform the role of principal (see Figure 4).

Maryland Instructional Leadership Outcomes
Facilitate the Development of a School Vision
Align All Aspects of a School Culture to Student and Adult Learning
Monitor the Alignment of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Improve Instructional Practices Through the Purposeful Observation and Evaluation of Teachers
Ensure the Regular Integration of Appropriate Assessments into Daily Classroom Instruction
Use Technology and Multiple Sources of Data to Improve Classroom Instruction
Provide Staff with Focused, Sustained, Research-based Professional Development
Engage All Community Stakeholders in a Shared Responsibility for Student and School Success

Figure 4. Maryland Instructional Leadership Outcomes

Philosophical Foundations

The North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) referenced all organizations and studies that have been reviewed as contributors to their decision to adopt the Standards for School Executives. The Board specifically explained its philosophical foundation for the adoption in December, 2006. The following statements of support attempt to encompass the importance of the many leadership strands principals

must now possess in order to prepare students for the 21st century. These statements also clarify the expectation that principals become executives in the profession rather than administrators in order to embrace continual change and to build powerful relationships. The following points outlined by the North Carolina State Board of Education (2006) underlie this work:

- Today schools must have proactive school executives who possess a great sense of urgency.
- The goal of school leadership is to transform schools so that large-scale, sustainable, continuous improvement becomes built in to their mode of operation.
- The moral purpose of school leadership is to create schools in which all students learn, the gap between high and low performance is greatly diminished and what students learn will prepare them for success in their futures, not ours.
- Leadership is not a position or a person. It is a practice that must be embedded in all job roles at all levels of the school district.
- The work of leadership is about working with, for and through people. It is a social act. Whether we are discussing instructional leadership, change leadership or leadership as learning, people are always the medium for the leader.
- Leadership is not about doing everything oneself but it is always about creating processes and systems that will cause everything to happen.
- Leadership is about the executive's ability to select and develop a strong executive staff whose complementary strengths promote excellence in all seven functions of leadership identified in this document.
- The concept of leadership is extremely complex and systemic in nature. Isolating the parts of leadership completely misses the power of the whole. It is not just knowing what to do, but why to do it, how to do it and when to do it.

- Within a school district there are nested leadership systems (local boards of education, central office, school, and classroom). For the organization to be successful these systems must be aligned and supportive, and function as a team.
- Leadership is about setting direction, aligning and motivating people to implement positive sustained improvement.
- Leaders bring their “person” to the practice of leadership. Matching the context of leadership to the “person” of the individual is important to the success of the leader. (pp. 1–2)

These specific statements reveal the influence from McREL, the Wallace Foundation, the Southern Regional Education Board, the Charlotte Advocates for Education, and the Maryland State Board of Education. Improvement in student achievement, collaborative leadership, professional development, alignment of leadership systems, and sustaining change are phrases that can be located throughout the supporting documents from these organizations. In fact the NCSBE adopted the actual leadership strands created by Portin et al. (2003) in conjunction with the Wallace Foundation to serve as the core evaluative components of the School Executive Standards.

Table 2

NCSBE Core Evaluative Components of the School Executive Standards

Critical Function	Action
Instructional Leadership	Assuring quality of instruction, modeling teaching practice, supervising curriculum, and assuring quality of teaching resources
Cultural Leadership	Tending to the symbolic resources of the school (e.g., its traditions, climate, and history)

Table 2 (cont.)

Critical Function	Action
Managerial Leadership	Tending to the operations of the school (e.g., its budget, schedule, facilities, safety and security, and transportation
Human Resource Leadership	Recruiting, hiring, firing, inducting, and mentoring teachers and administrators; developing leadership capacity and professional development opportunities
Strategic Leadership	Promoting a vision, mission, goals, and developing a means to reach them
External Development Leadership	Representing the school in the community, developing capital, public relations, recruiting students, buffering and mediating external interests, and advocating for the school's interest
Micropolitical Leadership	Buffering and mediating internal interest, maximizing resources (financial and human)

Within each leadership strand, a summary is provided that explains the core purpose and responsibility expected of each principal. Artifacts are also listed that prompt school leaders to implement specific leadership strands through their use. Teacher Working Conditions Surveys, School Improvement Plans, and teacher retention data are examples that require principals to examine qualitative and quantitative data prior to making a leadership decision. Competencies are also included for principals' reference.

A competency is defined by the NCSBE (2006) as "a combination of knowledge (factual and experiential) and skills that one needs to effectively implement the practices" (p. 9). A long list of competencies is provided for school leaders that includes but is not limited to communication, creative thinking, emotional intelligence, and global

perspective. Although not identical, these competencies directly link to McREL's 21 responsibilities for principals. The NCSBE also emphasized the necessity to share leadership as school administrators meet all knowledge and skill bases set forth. The following statements by the NCSBE (2006) model the research provided by Portin et al. (2003) with the Wallace Foundation.

There are many competencies that are obviously inherent in the successful performance of all of the practices listed under each of the seven critical functions of leadership. The principal may or may not personally possess all of these competencies but must ensure that a team is in place that not only possesses them but can effectively and efficiently execute them. Although the principal may not personally possess them all, he or she is still responsible for their effective use in the various leadership practices (p. 9).

The Seven Leadership Functions

A closer examination of leadership strands and their roles in the evaluation process can specifically identify benefits that the new School Executive Standards provide for improving principal leadership. It will also provide insight to the challenges that principals will face when striving to become distinguished leaders in each function.

Strategic Leadership:

The North Carolina State Board of Education (2006) defines strategic leadership as the ability to create “a climate of inquiry that challenges the school community to continually re-purpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway to reach it” (p. 3). The School Executive Standards challenge school leaders to approach leadership with thoughtfulness and concern for the school community. It is understandable to require an overall strategy for leadership in any

profession, but especially the education field that undoubtedly impacts all citizens throughout their lifetime. It is also crucial to ask if a capacity for learning and development has been established along with these standards that intend to support principals as they strive for strategic leadership. Waters and Grubb (2004) explain the importance of clarifying job responsibilities for school principals.

One way to make a seemingly impossible job more manageable is to achieve clarity on what is essential as well as what is important. Such clarity can help principals prioritize the demands of the job by helping them focus first on the responsibilities and practices correlated with student achievement rather than attempting to fulfill every responsibility that someone deemed important regardless of its impact on learning (p. 2).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is described by the North Carolina State Board of Education (2006) as setting

high standards for the professional practice of 21st century instruction and assessment that result in a no nonsense accountable environment. The school executive must be knowledgeable of best instructional and school practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school for the design of highly engaging schoolwork for students . . . (p. 4)

Similar to the strategic leadership strand, instructional leadership requires intensive respect to student performance and summative outcomes. Principals who desire to be evaluated as distinguished in these strands must pay close attention to each student's academic strengths and weaknesses while enabling others on staff to do the same. The instructional leadership strand defined by the NCSBE specifically references the following practices as distinguished levels of implementation:

Focuses his or her own and others' attention persistently and publicly on learning and teaching by initiating and guiding conversations about instruction and student learning that are oriented towards high expectations and concrete goals
Creates an environment of practiced distributive leadership and teacher empowerment

Challenges staff to reflect deeply on and define what knowledge, skills and concepts are essential to the complete educational development of students

Creates processes for collecting and using student test data and other formative data from other sources for the improvement of instruction;

Creates processes for identifying, benchmarking and providing students access to a variety of 21st century instructional tools (e.g., technology) and best practices for meeting diverse student needs

Ensures that there is an appropriate and logical alignment between the curriculum of the school and the state's accountability program. (p. 4)

While other best instructional practices are also listed, this compilation accurately reveals the urgency to academically improve students as well as schools. It is important to credit the efforts of the North Carolina State Board of Education to make student achievement the primary priority of educational leadership.

Cultural Leadership

Cultural leadership is not a new expectation for principals in North Carolina. The ISLLC standards (NPBEA, 2008) placed priority on establishing and maintaining a culture conducive for student success. The new School Executive Standards designate this leadership requirement as a crucial component for students and faculty. The State Board of Education (2006) intends that:

School executives will understand and act on the understanding of the important role a school's culture contributes to the exemplary performance of the school. School executives must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and

positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future. A school executive must be able to “reculture” the school if needed to align with school’s goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of the adults and students with passion, meaning and purpose. Cultural leadership implies understanding the school as the people in it each day, how they came to their current state, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school’s efforts to achieve individual and collective goals. (p. 5)

The SES standards relay the importance of a collaborative culture that enables teachers to make instructional decisions for their classrooms. Best leadership practices that the State Board (2006) supports include:

- Creates a collaborative work environment predicated on site-based management that supports the “team” as the basic unit of learning and decision-making within the school and promotes cohesion and cooperation among staff
- Promotes a sense of well-being among staff, students and parents;

- Builds a sense of efficacy and empowerment among staff that result in a “can do” attitude when faced with challenges;

- Empowers staff to recommend creative 21st century concepts for school improvement. (p. 5)

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education (2006), the state experienced an average of almost a 13% teacher turnover rate during the last academic year. While this has slightly decreased since past years, turnover has been on the radar as a continual challenge. The Cultural Leadership strand intends to address this rate through teacher empowerment and collaborative decision making. Principals who strive for distinguished marks in this strand are expected

to review the school's Teacher Working Conditions Survey, the school's retention data, and effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities.

There is growing consensus that the single most important factor in determining student performance is the quality of the teacher. According to Fallon (2005), if the national goal of providing an equitable education to children across this nation is to be met, it is critical that efforts be concentrated on developing and retaining high-quality teachers in every community and at every grade level. Based on this input from the Alliance for Excellence Education, the North Carolina School Executive Standards align with the national movement to retain high quality teachers.

Human Resource Leadership

Rather than the assumed hiring and firing tasks, the human resources strand involves many more functions for the school executive. Principals are challenged to provide a structure and capacity for teachers to receive staff development based on their strengths and areas of improvement. They are also given the task of creating and sustaining a climate that is conducive for positive work environment. The School Executive Standards hold administrators responsible for the overall development of the school community. SES lists components of this task and requires data utilization to ensure that staff members are actively participating in developmental activities and are professionally developing.

The new standards reveal a conscience movement by the State Board to strengthen relationships between school administrators and teachers. A move toward collaborative professional learning communities requires executives to rethink

relationship approaches and sustainable support for teachers in various professional arenas.

Managerial Leadership

According to the North Carolina State Board of Education (2006), the Managerial Leadership strand for school executives will ensure that the school has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, problem solving, communicating expectations and scheduling that result in organizing the work routines in the building. Management can easily be overlooked in the principalship due to the heavy focus on academic accountability. Principals are given the task to be not only instructional leaders, but also building managers. The management strand is essential to ensure that a school executive:

Creates processes to provide for a balanced operational budget for school programs and activities

Creates processes to recruit and retain a high-quality workforce in the school that meets the diverse needs of students

Creates processes to identify and solve, resolve, dissolve or absolve school-based problems/conflicts in a fair, democratic way

Designs a system of communication that provides for the timely, responsible sharing of information to, from, and with school and district staff

Designs scheduling processes and protocols that maximize staff input and addresses diverse student learning needs

Develops a master schedule for the school to maximize student learning by providing for individual and on-going collaborative planning for every teacher

Collaboratively develops and enforces clear expectations, structures, rules and procedures for students and staff. (p. 7)

These tasks were not set aside and deemed unimportant in the new standards.

Instructional improvement takes center stage under the No Child Left Behind era, but a managerial framework must be established within a school in order to allow for best instructional practices to occur.

External Development Leadership

This leadership strand established by the NCSBE (2006) expects school executives to design structures and processes that result in community engagement, support, and ownership. Primarily, principals are given the task to engage “stockholders” in the community with conversation and involvement inside the school. School executives should track parent and community volunteer numbers, increase involvement in PTSA, Parent Teacher Student Association, and create surveys that assess the concerns of the school’s external framework.

Parents are an integral part to a school’s academic success, but must sometimes be enticed to offer support. The SES places a priority on parental and community members becoming not only involved in the school, but having an active voice in decision making. This leadership strand strengthens the principal’s potential capacity for success by requiring a collaborative setting both in and outside of the school community.

Micropolitical Leadership

According to the School Executive Standards (2006), the school executive will build systems and relationships that utilize the staff’s diversity, encourage constructive ideological conflict in order to leverage staff expertise, power and influence to realize the school’s vision for success. This final strand holds school principals accountable for

tapping the potential of each staff member based on individually observed strengths and weaknesses. Strong, professional relationships are expected to develop between administration and teachers in order for empowerment to develop throughout the school community.

The micro-political strand dissuades educational leaders from enforcing a top-down management approach that can fail to utilize valuable input from others on a team. Schmoker (2006) states, “No one can lead in an environment where differences in practice and learning outcomes are ignored or trivialized. No one can lead effectively where constructive feedback is regarded as an invasion of privacy, an affront to professionalism” (p. 29). The new executive standards (2006) ask leaders of 21st century schools to:

create an environment and mechanisms to ensure all internal stakeholder voices are heard and respected

create processes and protocols to buffer and mediate staff interests

demonstrate awareness of informal groups and relationships among school staff and utilizes these as a positive resource

be easily accessible to teachers and staff. (p. 8)

Building Leadership Capacity

The School Executive Standards entail seven specific leadership strands that principals in North Carolina must strive to meet. Clear definitions of each strand are offered along with a rubric for assessment, examples of best practices, and lists of artifacts to document implementation of each strand. Under these standards, principals

are held to high expectations to primarily increase academic performance and to establish a collaborative atmosphere with teachers, parents, and members of the community. The SES has responded well to our current age of school accountability that requires each school to continually grow in academics each school year. Principals' priorities have been established in order to clarify what school leaders must do to become distinguished executives in education. The full encompassment of responsibilities once thought to all represent essential qualities of the principalship have been acutely diminished to respond to demands No Child Left Behind and the state's current ABC's accountability model.

A call for academic excellence and collaborative professional learning communities bring democratic ideals to the forefront of the SES. Shared leadership that enables all professionals to gain ownership in the education process is a democratic approach to leadership that should be praised. According to Brubaker (2004), "In a learning community, the purpose is 'learning'; therefore personal and collective growth are the products of that relationship" (p. 130).

Linda Lambert (2003) writes that

adult leaders who build the leadership capacity of their schools create learning environments and experiences for students that result in:

Academic achievement as gauged by both authentic performance measures and test scores;

Positive involvement: good attendance, few suspensions, low dropout rate, high graduation rate, and parent and student satisfaction;

Resiliency behaviors such as self-direction, problem solving, social competence, participation, contributions to others, and a sense of purpose and a future;

Equitable gains across socioeconomic, race, ethnicity, and gender groups;
A closing of the “achievement gap”; and

Sustained improvements over time. (pp. 54–55)

Our school leaders must strive to accomplish these goals for all students by facilitating the School Executive Standards along with their ethical compass for children. A combination of the two will potentially result in marked academic improvement, collaborative teaching environments, and authentic learning opportunities for students. As described by Leone, Warnimont, and Zimmerman (2009), a principal must be a “navigator who directs the future course of the school through an active approach that involves being a change agent, developing strong community bonds, and focusing on a successful, productive future for all involved” (p. 89).

Clarification of Expectations

Since adoption in 2006, the North Carolina State Board of Education (2008) has clarified integral components of the School Executive Standards and provided professional development opportunities to stakeholders across all school systems. An attempt was made to provide a clearer understanding about the actual evaluation process. Principals were made aware of the specific steps that would be followed throughout the process.

Step 1: Orientation

Step 2: Pre-Evaluation Planning

Step 3: Meeting with Superintendent/Designee

Step 4: Data Collection

Step 5: Prepare a Consolidated Performance Assessment

Step 6: Meeting between Principal and Superintendent/Designee (p. 4)

More insight was also given to the rating scale that would be used to evaluate each principal in each leadership strand.

Developing: Principal did not meet standards for performance, but demonstrated adequate growth toward meeting standards during the period of performance.

Proficient: Principal demonstrated basic competence on standards of performance.

Accomplished: Principal exceeded basic competence on standards for performance most of the time.

Distinguished: Principal consistently and significantly exceeded basic competence on standards of performance.

Not Evident/Not Demonstrated: Superintendent was not able to make a judgment about level of performance. (p. 4)

Framework of the SES Evaluation Process

Principals in North Carolina have been given the framework, the actual leadership strands and competencies to master, artifacts as examples, and the rubric to determine their success. As with any new initiative, time to adapt and genuinely learn how to become proficient, at a minimum, and eventually distinguished in these leadership areas will be required. There is yet to be a verdict regarding the success these standards will bring to student achievement or the leadership profession in general. However, the North Carolina State Board of Education (2006) is confident that expectations have been clearly defined and the methodology to reach these standards has been provided. Unlike many current efforts that look at all of the things principals “might” or “should” do, this study examined what principals actually do. As such, it is grounded in practice, exploits story

and narrative, and supports the distribution of leadership rather than the “hero leader” (p. 3).

According to the State Board of Education (NCSBE, 2008), the School Executive Standards should serve as a guide for principals to reflect on and improve upon their effectiveness as school leaders. Each leadership strand provides a summary and list of best practices that model what the strand should look like in action. An artifact list is also provided that suggests a variety of documents and tools that leaders should reference when reflecting on their abilities to lead in a specific capacity. A list of competencies, or combination of knowledge and skills one needs to implement the leadership practices, are also provided. This extensive list suggests that principals must collaboratively share leadership responsibilities in order to be most effective in their roles.

Principals are formally assessed on the School Executive Standards in a seven step process defined by the revisions made by the NCSBE (2008). They must first become oriented with all expectations via their supervisor. Principals must then complete a self-assessment and meet individually with their supervisor for input on goals for the upcoming school year. Data will then be collected by the principal throughout the year to document their efforts and achievements. A mid-year evaluation occurs to assess progress and to revisit goals. Principals are then challenged to prepare a consolidated performance assessment that summarizes their data collection and progress currently made. A final step is a formal meeting with the supervisor to assess strengths in each leadership strand as well as areas of improvement.

Supportive Research

It should be noted that the North Carolina School Executive Standards are set on a relatively light literature base. However, since the adoption of the SES, additional research has been published by the Wallace Foundation that further documents how supportive leadership strategies from district administrators can benefit school principals. Considering that my research intends to identify sustainable levels of support that central office leaders can incorporate into their work with principals, relevant studies must be referenced.

Supportive Leadership Practices

Central Office Transformation for District-wide Teaching and Learning

Improvement was released by the Wallace Foundation in April 2010. Led by Honig, the study targeted three large school districts that were attempting to transform the relationships in place between the schools and district office. Primarily, Honig's team (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010) wanted to know what functions needed to be present for school leaders to promote and support a learning environment within a school, district, and state system (intro).

Research was conducted in the Atlanta Public Schools, the New York City Empowerment Schools Organization, and the Oakland Unified School District in California. Honig et al. (2010) conducted an "in-depth comparative, qualitative case study of these three districts, primarily during the 2007-2008 academic year" (p. 15). Research heavily relied on observations of district level administrators as they interacted with school leaders on reform projects.

Throughout numerous observations across the three districts, improvement in teaching and learning occurred when central office became an entity of the instructional improvement process. That is, every conversation led by central office administrators and every task carried out was linked to improvement in the teaching and learning process.

According to Honig et al. (2010), some

central office reforms aim to increase the efficiency with which the central office provides basic services to schools. Many central office leaders say that they work in service of teaching and learning. In transforming central offices, by contrast, staff are able to demonstrate how their work matters in concrete terms to teaching and learning improvement. (p. v)

Five dimensions of central office transformation emerged from the study that Honig believes must be in place in order for the district office to assist in instructional improvement. These dimensions are the core output from the study that describes the interactions that should exist between central office and school personnel. An intense focus will be placed on dimensions 1 and 2 as these directly link to the desired relationships between district staff and principals. These dimensions also closely examine the issue of principal support in conjunction to my anticipated field work and offer solutions for improvement.

Dimension 1: Learning—focused partnerships with school principals to deepen principals' instructional leadership practice.

Dimension 2: Assistance to the central office—principal partnerships.

Dimension 1. Honig's team (2010) found an essential need for partnerships to exist between the district and principals that specifically aimed to increase each school administrator's capacity to become an instructional leader.

Through these learning-focused partnerships, the central office aimed to make substantial investments in building the capacity of school principals to exercise instructional leadership. While definitions of instructional leadership varied somewhat across sites, the efforts across all sites suggested a consensus that when principals exercise instructional leadership, they work intensively with their teachers in and out of the classroom to critically examine the quality of their teaching practice and student work in an attempt to strengthen both. (p. 25)

Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) were assigned within each district to directly support and engage principals in instructional leadership. These district staff members were not the only personnel involved with principal support, but were the main contacts for the study. Through observations and interviews, the study revealed that levels of interaction varied from each district as well as between ILDs. According to Honig (2010), principals who received the most contact and support from ILDs reported a higher level of development of their instructional leadership skills. Frequency of interactions and quality of support positively influenced principals' perceptions of district engagement along with their perception of their own instructional leadership capacity. Honig et al. (2010) identified core one-on-one practices elicited by the ILDs that had a promising impact on strengthening principals.

Differentiating supports for principals' instructional leadership consistently over the entire academic year.

Modeling ways of thinking and acting that reflected desirable instructional leadership practice.

Developing and using tools.

Brokering resources supportive of principals' instructional leadership.

Tapping all principals in a network as resources for each other around their instructional leadership practice, including providing opportunities for all, not only those in high-achieving schools, to take on leadership roles within the network. (p. 27)

Differentiation of support is necessary due to the various levels of ability, experience, and need across the principalship. Honig's team (2010) worked closely with the three districts to determine frequency of interactions with principals, the type of support needed by principals, and how these indicators varied across the district.

When ILDs differentiated supports, they did not simply work with individual principals differently. Rather, they worked with each principal in ways that fit individual needs and strengths related to improving instructional leadership practice, much like expert classroom teachers differentiate instruction for individual students. (p. 30)

Although a common sense approach, central office supervisors were more in tune with their ability to differentiate when asked to be reflective on recent interactions with their principals of varied abilities. As ILDs became more aware of monitoring their approach variations while meeting with principals, many reported that their goal for improved achievement remained constant, but how principals developed to reach this goal was somewhat dependent on their interactions. Principals also reported that they felt an increase in understanding how to progress as a leader when interactions were consistent and relative to their surroundings. Reversely, principals who did not receive

continual feedback from ILDs that reduced contact throughout the school year felt a disconnect to the district.

Modeling ways of thinking and acting is another one-on-one practice that revealed success in building principals' leadership capacity. It must be stated that this strategy of support, as many others, relies on consistent interactions to be in place between the district and principals. Thus, a comfortable relationship is present that will support intensive interventions focused to promote school leadership. ILDs found success when specific scenarios that a principal faced were not just discussed but acted out. For example, principals were reported to face challenges when addressing teachers who struggled instructionally. Although the principals easily identified the areas where teachers were instructionally weak, they struggled to relay this to the teachers in a method that would elicit improvement. Rather than persuade school leaders to use a strategy that historically may have worked for an ILD, district supervisors actually walked principals through the process of meeting with a teacher for a post-conference. One ILD stated,

"I recognize that there's a delicate balance between what I know and what they need to know. And so telling them is really not an effective method." Instead this person routinely modeled particular instructional leadership practices, "because, ultimately, when I leave, I want them to know how to do it [exercise instructional leadership]." (as cited in Honig et al., 2010, p. 33)

Developing and using tools proved to be a successful strategy when ILDs attempted to strengthen principals' capacity for instructional improvement. Honig

prioritized four primary instructional tools found to be most helpful in the three observed districts:

- Teaching and learning frameworks

- Observation and walk-through protocols

- Cycle-of-inquiry protocols

- Data-based protocols focused on student outcomes

Honig's team believed that ILDs saw better instructional results from schools when principals were given a framework that outlined the best instructional practices that should be in place. Additionally, tools that provided a structure and schedule to find these practices and to identify their worth complimented each principal's capacity to improve student achievement.

In summary, these four tools allowed for a cycle of thought to take place that began with what students should learn and ended with the discovery of whether or not students learned what they were taught. Frameworks that highlighted the curriculum and pace of instruction allowed principals to focus on what they should see in each classroom and avoided any guesswork. Observations, formal and informal, must be scheduled and purposeful in that principals look for practices and content highlighted in the teaching and learning frameworks. ILDs reviewed principals' findings in classrooms via a cycle-of inquiry which involved asking them questions to spark reflection on what they observed. This strategy allowed for structured conversations between school and district leaders that were not haphazard, but rather, purposefully based around instructional performance within the school. Data conversations followed that intentionally focused on outcomes of

students and what the data could reveal about areas of instructional strengths and areas of improvement. Again, ILDs posed questions about the data that restarted the cycle and prompted principals to revisit the teaching and learning frameworks that drove instruction within their schools.

Brokering resources for principals and establishing networks of support were tools used by ILDs to promote the professional development and support web for school leaders in their districts. Professional development opportunities can easily be overlooked or avoided due to the many tasks at hand during the school day. The fear of getting further behind and the thought that training sessions will be irrelevant frequently caused principals to miss out on learning opportunities. ILDs sought out professional development opportunities within and outside of the district for principals. These sessions were selected based on the needs of school leaders that arose during cycle-of-inquiry and data based conversations. This ensured a match between a principal's needs and the relevance of the session.

A network system was developed in the three districts studied that allowed principals to share resources and strategies with their colleagues. Rather than sit and get, principal discussions involved best practices being presented as a relevant strategy that could be universally implemented across the district. Just as student-led instruction benefits students, this leadership tool made interactions more meaningful for principals and created a sense of ownership.

Dimension 2. The supervision of principals can be a daunting task considering the many other responsibilities central office personnel are assigned in addition to supervisory duties. Honig and the research team noted this challenge faced by ILDs within the three observed districts. Not only were supervisors overloaded with tasks, but many reported that they felt under-prepared in relation to professional development areas that could strengthen their support structures for principals. Furthermore, it was noted that other central office administrators not in direct supervision of principals often worked around the ILDs rather than with them when interacting with school leaders. Honig et al. (2010) proposed four levels of support that could potentially assist central office relationships and how support is offered to principals.

The first of these four supportive interventions involved opportunities for professional development that would benefit district level supervisors. Honig found that ILDs were recharged when given the opportunity to collaboratively meet and discuss the challenges of their position. Sharing ideas and absorbing new practices among colleagues were luxuries that most ILDs reported as helpful but were rare occurrences. Although ILDs met frequently, these interactions were absorbed by operational issues or new external ideas brought back by higher level administrators who wanted to consider implementation. Honig's team uncovered the value of structured professional development sessions that centered on the core duties of ILDs—principal support and improvement in leadership.

A second support mechanism that emerged was the removal of task overload. ILDs reported that time spent with principals was constantly threatened or even

eliminated due to other responsibilities related to their role. Within the three researched districts, a plan to protect time with principals was developed. Although implemented differently in each district, this support strategy involved senior administrators agreeing to this protection and even a redistribution of tasks to lighten the load of ILDs. There were even “blackout days” in Atlanta that prevented district supervisors from being pulled for any meetings or external duties (p. 61). Rather, their time was spent in schools to observe and to meet with principals. Although the duties back at the district did not disappear and had to be addressed at some point, the purpose was to prioritize the mission of principal support.

A third solution that benefitted increased district support to principals involved a shift in interactions at the district level. ILDs reported that challenges existed when considering how other central office administrators interacted with principals and what was actually said to them. Honig et al. pointed out the significance of leading through the ILDs rather than around them when referencing other supervisors within the district. Instead of intentionally or unintentionally circumventing the ILDs, an effort should be made to reinforce their efforts and input to principals.

When other central office administrators did not engage in such activities, ILDs generally reported spending time dealing with the resulting confusion and noted how the lack of reinforcement for their work undermined their relationships with some school principals. (p. 63)

Overlap often occurs when each department or division at central office attempts to train, visit, and interact with principals. This overlap could potentially be avoided with concise communication at the district level. Conflicting advice from district departments

can lead to a lack of credibility and certainly does not benefit principal support. Too often, a departmentalized central office will house directors with blinders on who believe that their priorities solely stand alone. Of course, the hazard that exists emerges when principals realize the conflicts of interests at the district level and become frustrated with an unclear mission. As stated by Burrello, Lashley, and Beatty (2001) in *Educating All Students Together: How School Leaders Create Unified Systems*, “As professionals, we have learned that we cannot prescribe for other professionals. We start by offering a compelling incentive that fosters growth on a desire to get better” (p. 76). Honig attempted to reveal the worth of collaborative communication at the district level and also the value of consistency when interacting with principals.

A final support mechanism for ILDs involved all district administrators holding principals accountable for student achievement—not just their direct supervisors. Certainly, this strategy will only be successful after clear alignment at central office has occurred. The support for distributed accountability emerged when ILDs discussed the unhealthy link to evaluation and support. Frequently, principals would not ask ILDs important questions or ask for support due to the impact they thought it might have on their evaluations. A possible reputation could be earned by exposing weaknesses so the risk of not knowing was taken over asking for support. The power of the pen must be offset by involving all district staff in principal support as well as student achievement.

Honig et al. (2010) suggested that a “balanced score card” could be in place that evenly distributed evaluation responsibilities across central office. More importantly, the ILDs in the study, or those directly geared to offer principal support for improved

achievement would be freed to have genuine supportive conversations with principals without the threat of evaluative harm (p. 67).

Honig et al.'s (2010) study is an excellent example of problem solving skills being implemented with purpose and with an end result in mind. Improvement in principal support must be brought about with a strategic plan and must account for the specific roles district administrators will play throughout the process. Honig revealed that one-on-one interactions are crucial if central office personnel are to appropriately support school leaders. Strengths and weakness of principals must be carefully identified and those principals must be enabled to make needed improvements. This thoughtful and ongoing process is how central offices become transformed with a sole focus of instructional improvement.

In “Strategies for Your Improvement: A Developmental Guide for Educational Leaders Utilizing 360 Degrees Feedback,” authors Coble, Clodfelter, and Brubaker (2007) comment on problem solving as a mechanism for success:

Problem solving is the mechanism through which we connect with others in learning communities. It is the sharing of the challenge of working through the problem, that we are forced to wisely use presently identified resources and in the process we generate new resources that we often didn't know existed. Although some of these newly discovered resources are nonhuman, most of them are human—the talents persons bring to the table in order to meet mutually agreed upon challenges. (p. 109)

The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership was released by the Southern Regional Education Board in August, 2010. The SREB conducted an investigation involving

thirty-five interviews of district level staff and school board chairs from seven school systems to determine the type of support offered to principals that allowed for school improvement. This research was prompted by the reality of many failing at-risk schools that had not met the standards set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Findings by the SREB (2010) revealed that district level administration failed “to create conditions that make it possible for principals to lead school improvement effectively” (p. ii). The district’s essential job should be the development and communication of a shared vision that clearly articulate the goals of the system to schools and to the community. The SREB (2010) presented nine strategies that could assist districts to portraying this vision to school administrators.

1. Work with a cross-section of community and school leaders to create a strategic vision for graduating students who are prepared for a range of postsecondary options.
2. Focus on policies and support services that will enhance each school’s ability to achieve its own strategic vision and plan within the context of the district’s vision.
3. Develop tools and processes that principals and teachers can use to ensure that instruction for all groups of students is aligned with college- and career-readiness standards.
4. Invest in high-quality professional development for the district staff, school principals and teachers.
5. Lead schools to analyze a variety of data—beyond test scores—and discover the root causes behind student failure or dropping out.
6. Give school principals real authority in the areas of staff selection, school scheduling, instructional programs, and use of and redirection of new and existing resources.

7. Consider working with an external school improvement provider to develop a strategic vision that can move the district forward.
8. Develop a succession plan for school principals.
9. Engage parents and the larger community in ongoing dialogue about the changes needed to prepare more students for success in high school, college, careers and citizenship. (pp. iv-v)

Similar to Honig's call for reform in support from the district through a strategic plan, the SREB pinpointed nine strategies that would require the collaboration of central office personnel, principals, and stakeholders in the community. These can be closely linked to the seven SES standards recently adopted by the North Carolina State Board of Education. Furthermore, these strategies help to define the methodology needed to further investigate supportive district strategies that will promote principals to distinguished levels of leadership.

Implications for the School Executive Standards

Honig and her team were able to capture this problem solving process through observations and interactions with district supervisors who purposefully transformed their interactions and supportive strategies with principals. Their result was a noticed improvement in instructional leadership that emphasized the capacity of principals to professionally evolve with the mission of each school district. In relation to the North Carolina School Executive Standards, principals must initially complete a self-assessment of their leadership abilities and gather documentation throughout the academic year that supports their professional growth towards distinguished leadership. Evaluators of principals are expected to assist in identifying strengths and areas of improvement for

each building administrators. They should also offer recommendations along the course of the evaluation process. The specific responsibilities for each party involved in the NC SES are:

Principal Responsibilities:

- Know and understand the North Carolina School Executive Performance Standards.
- Understand the School Executive: Principal Evaluation Process.
- Prepare for the Pre-Evaluation Conference, including a self-evaluation, identification of performance goals, and identifying change initiatives underway at their school;
- Gather data, artifacts, evidence to support performance in relation to standards and progress in attaining goals.
- Develop and implement strategies to improve personal performance/attain goals in areas individually or collaboratively identified.
- Participate in the Final Evaluation Conference.

Evaluator Responsibilities:

- Know and understand the North Carolina School Executive Performance Standards.
- Participate in training to understand and implement the Principal Evaluation Process.
- Supervise the Principal Evaluation Process and ensure that all steps in the process are conducted according to the agreed upon process.
- Identify the principal's strengths and areas for improvement and making recommendations for improvement.
- Ensure that the contents of the Principal Summary Evaluation Report contain accurate information and accurately reflect the principal's individual performance. (NCSBE, 2008, p. 4)

Honig's findings serve as an essential reference for my proposed research. While the NC SES clearly state role responsibilities for principals and their evaluators, interactive strategies that district personnel can use to support principals is not easily identified from the text of the standards. In other words, what needs to be done is clear

but how to get it done is left to individual districts to decide. Honig offers a relevant study that provides insight as to how central office administrators and school principals can communicate efficiently to improve student achievement and a capacity for leadership. The strategies used within the study can be referenced as I attempt to discover supportive strategies that will benefit principals' growth in the North Carolina School Executive Standards.

Standards-driven Evaluation Systems

Assessing the Promise of Standards-Based Performance Evaluation for Principals: Results from a Randomized Trial attempted to identify the effectiveness of a standards-driven evaluation system to professionally advance principals and to improve the performance of their schools. Kimball, Milanowski, and McKinney (2009) began their assessment with the acknowledgement that "there is little research on whether the use of leadership standards for any purpose affects principal practice or school performance" (p. 234). The trial was completed in a diverse school district in the western United States that served more than 60,000 students. Principals in the district were randomly assigned to be evaluated by the old evaluation system or the new standards-driven system. It was hypothesized that principals exposed to the new system would report the following:

1. Clearer performance expectations
2. Perception of receiving higher quality performance feedback
3. Perception that their evaluation was more useful in improving performance
4. Perception that the system was more fair
5. More satisfaction with the evaluation system overall
6. Reporting that more time and effort spent on job facets were emphasized in the new evaluation system. (p. 237)

The study included a rating scale that principals were asked to complete that identified how most of their time and efforts were spent during the evaluation year. Comparative ratios were created between those on the old evaluation system and those on the new. Four choices (developing a school mission statement, analyzing student achievement data, understanding student academic standards, and improving the use of technology) were explicitly linked to the new evaluation system. Some principals were also interviewed in order to assess their perception of the evaluation system and its relevance to their performance. Finally, the actual evaluations received by principals under both systems were examined at the end of the year along with school improvement plans to compare priority areas of focus.

Implications for the SES Evaluation Process

Findings from the study indicated that many variables come into play with any evaluation system. The experience of the principal, the type of school where he or she worked, and the relationship with the supervisor all impacted the value of an evaluation process. The researchers also noted that principal behavior is not solely directed by an evaluation system. The day to day interactions with their supervisors, communication at district-level meetings, professional development opportunities, and their own personal perceptions of the job influenced their actions just as heavily as the expectations of the evaluation instrument. Another finding revealed that the majority of principals viewed the standards-driven evaluation system as an opportunity for development rather than a measure of their accountability. Similar to the old evaluation system, school administrators viewed a formal evaluation process as a formative measure that could be

revisited throughout the year to determine their progress. Although well aware of their accountability expectations, principals did not report that their evaluations should be solely based on student performance and did not feel threatened by a standards-driven evaluation.

Several implications were drawn from this study. Kimball et al. (2009) discovered that

if districts want to realize the potential of standards-based evaluation to guide principal behavior, they need to ensure it is implemented as intended, to recognize that evaluation is only one influence on principals . . . implementation of standards-driven evaluation is not simply a matter of designing a new instrument. (p. 258)

The challenge of implementation was far greater than the creation of the instrument. Substantial effort was needed by both principals and district supervisors to change communication strategies and align priorities as outlined by the tool.

The study also concluded that a standards-driven evaluation system may be most appropriate when used formatively and on an individual basis. Since no two schools are alike and principals' areas of need can greatly contrast, supervisors should differentiate their support by choosing evaluation standards on which to focus with each school administrator. An abundance of standards could negatively affect the implementation process and alter the fidelity of support that intended to professionally advance principals.

Finally, a great deal of time, effort, and commitment from the district to implement a standards-driven evaluation system must be in place if gains are to be

measured. The researchers argued that it may be cost inefficient to conduct such an initiative considering the limited resources and time constraints that many school systems battle. Furthermore, a standards-based system will require the district supervisors and principals to fully understand and abide by set expectations. The ability to monitor this dedication can become overwhelming, and in the end, efforts are spent on accuracy of implementation rather than the desired outcomes for principals' progression within their field.

Summary of Literature Review

Research that contributed to the creation of the SES indicates that principals will be expected to operate with a diverse skill set that encompasses all seven leadership functions. Within this balanced leadership model, specific responsibilities as well as effective strategies to facilitate these tasks have been put forth. A framework of the evaluation process outlines a rating scale of performance with the expectation that principals minimally operate at a proficient level with aspirations of becoming distinguished school executives in each leadership strand (see Figure 5). The responsibilities of principals have been prioritized with specific desired outcomes—all of which intend to build the capacity for improved student achievement.

The structure of support offered to principals should be aligned to their professional needs if they are to aspire to a distinguished level of leadership. Supporting research indicates that consistent and supportive interactions from the district level must be in place. A transformation of how these interactions occur may be needed if principals are to grow from proficient to distinguished ratings. The challenge of creating a

systematic support structure from the district level arises from the implications of the research.

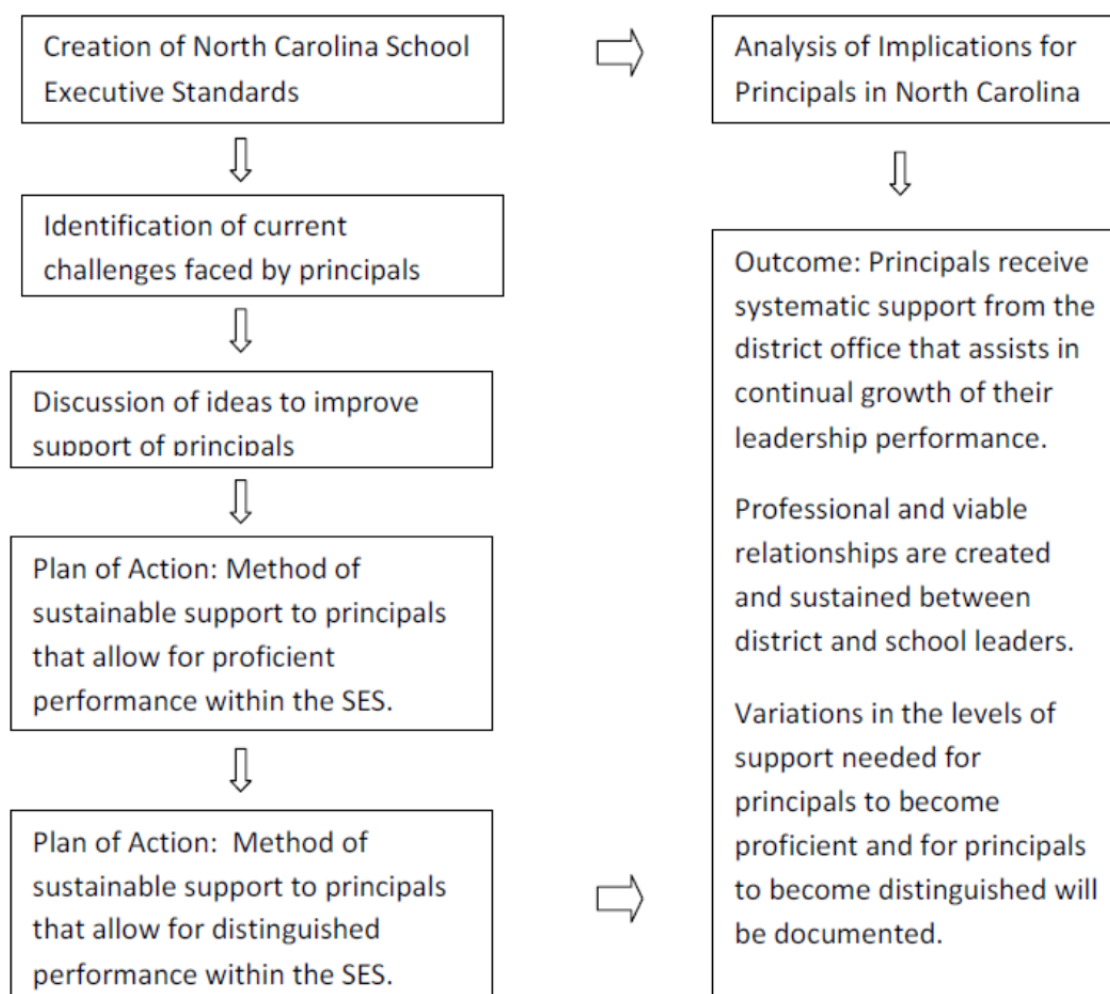


Figure 5. Conceptual Framework

I intend to use my knowledge of the North Carolina School Executive Standards to guide my fieldwork as I explore the current challenges faced by school principals and how district administrators can provide them with support to become distinguished leaders. Interviewing central office staff who supervise school principals will document

strategies of support that are successfully benefiting building administrators. A compilation of “what works” within numerous school districts will be created that will synthesize the most effective and sustainable means of support that can be offered to principals as they progress within each leadership function of the SES.

A review of the founding documents and supportive sources that contribute to the North Carolina School Executive Standards is essential knowledge needed prior to any fieldwork that hopes to strengthen school leaders’ abilities to reach these expectations. With a clear understanding of the foundations of the SES, the work of inquiry must begin with thoughtful considerations to the methodology and conceptual framework.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The identification of effective and sustainable strategies of support offered from district leadership to school principals in relation to the North Carolina School Executive Standards (SES) is the central component of the conceptual framework for this research study. Specifically, this was an investigation of the challenges that current principals face and how their central office supervisors can alleviate these obstacles. The identified supportive strategies should assist principals to meet the expectations of all seven leadership functions outlined by the SES.

A principal's performance rating can range from not meeting leadership standards to consistently exceeding them. The SES (NCSBE, 2008) rates principals in each leadership function on the following scale:

Developing: Principal did not meet standards for performance, but demonstrated adequate growth toward meeting standards during the period of performance.

Proficient: Principal demonstrated basic competence on standards of performance.

Accomplished: Principal exceeded basic competence on standards for performance most of the time.

Distinguished: Principal consistently and significantly exceeded basic competence on standards of performance.

Not Evident/Not Demonstrated: Superintendent was not able to make a judgment about level of performance. (p. 4)

Based on this rubric, principals must function at proficient levels in order to minimally meet the expectations set forth by the SES. In other words, school leaders who earn this status are considered competent in each leadership strand but have not gone above and beyond the required levels of performance. Principals at this level within the seven SES functions would be expected to continually grow as school executives in order to aspire to an accomplished or distinguished rating.

Distinguished performance is the highest rating principals can receive within the SES performance scale. Principals in this category have not only implemented effective leadership strategies within a leadership function, they have positively impacted the advancement of the school and students related to academic improvement and “helped to re-image the school’s vision, mission, and goals in the 21st century” (p. 5).

The focus on distinguished levels of school leadership is crucial under the North Carolina School Executive Standards due to a push for shared leadership, building teacher leaders, and creating a capacity within a school for ongoing professional growth. The SES indicates that principals will be rated as distinguished school executives once they have gone beyond a basic understanding of each stand as well as the implementation process within their schools. Distinguished leadership requires principals to embrace all stakeholders and utilize their abilities to lead in order to maximize the capacity of the school to excel. Just as Portin discussed that principals cannot be leaders by themselves or without support, the SES challenges principals to become leaders of leaders to overcome the many challenges of the school principalship.

Principals are formally assessed on the School Executive Standards in a seven step process defined by the revisions made by the NCSBE (2008). They must first become oriented with all expectations via their supervisor. Principals must then complete a self-assessment and meet individually with their supervisor for input on goals for the upcoming school year. Data will then be collected by the principal throughout the year to document their efforts and achievements. A mid-year evaluation occurs to assess progress and to revisit goals. Principals are then challenged to prepare a consolidated performance assessment that summarizes their data collection and progress currently made. A final step is a formal meeting with the supervisor to assess strengths in each leadership strand as well as areas of improvement.

I was specifically interested in understanding the challenges principals face to maintain a proficient level of performance since this rating is the minimum level at which principals can function and still meet the basic requirements of the School Executive Standards. I was also interested in discovering what central office support staff can offer principals to help them sustain proficient performance. In addition, I researched what support principals needed to aspire to a distinguished level of performance within the SES. Finally, what further means of support can district administration provide to help principals reach this highest level of performance? My research was an attempt to align the expectations of each SES leadership function with the needs of principals who must reach these goals. By contrasting the differences in levels of support needed to maintain proficiency and aspire to distinguished performance, I hoped to set a standard of support that can be offered to each principal based on his or her capacity to professionally grow

in each of the seven functions. Furthermore, this research will assist in identifying the types of professional development that should be offered by a district in order to enhance the performance of school leaders. A baseline of essential support that must be in place for proficient performance should emerge that can be built upon to develop potential distinguished school executives as they progress in the role of the principalship.

The following questions served as a template for my research inquiry. These were the basis for eliciting responses from all participants in the study.

Research Questions

1. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do principals say that they need to be proficient school leaders?
2. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do district administrators say should be offered to principals to be proficient school leaders?
3. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do principals say that they need to be distinguished school leaders?
4. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do district administrators say should be offered to principals to become distinguished school leaders?
5. What do principals say they need from district administration during the actual evaluation process of the new set of standards?
6. What do district administrators say principals need during the actual evaluation process of the new set of standards?

My approach to asking these research questions was to briefly introduce the School Executive Standards to principals and district administrators. The seven core leadership functions served as prompts as I sought to determine the support needed from principals in each area as well as the types of support that district administrators defined as necessary. A discretion was continually made between needed support for proficient and distinguished performance. Principals interviewed were given the opportunity to provide open-ended responses that revealed their needs for professional development. District administrators were also given this opportunity to reveal what mechanisms of support were held at high value when servicing principals.

The conceptual framework for the study is once again referenced to indicate the importance of outcomes related to both sustainable support for principals as proficient executives as well as additional variations in support to become distinguished school executives (see Figure 6). As indicated in the research questions, an attempt was made to identify these differences in order to discover how district administrators can more successfully assist principals in all leadership functions.

Description of the Methodology

This was a case study of what one school district currently had in place to meet the expectations of the North Carolina School Executive Standards. Focused interviews with principals and district office staff took place and findings were compiled that revealed trends relating to current challenges in the role of the principalship. Effective methods that district staff have implemented to address these challenges were linked to leadership functions and expectations within the SES. Significant attention was given to

how the needs of principals and levels of support offered vary when discussing the proficient and distinguished performance levels of the SES.

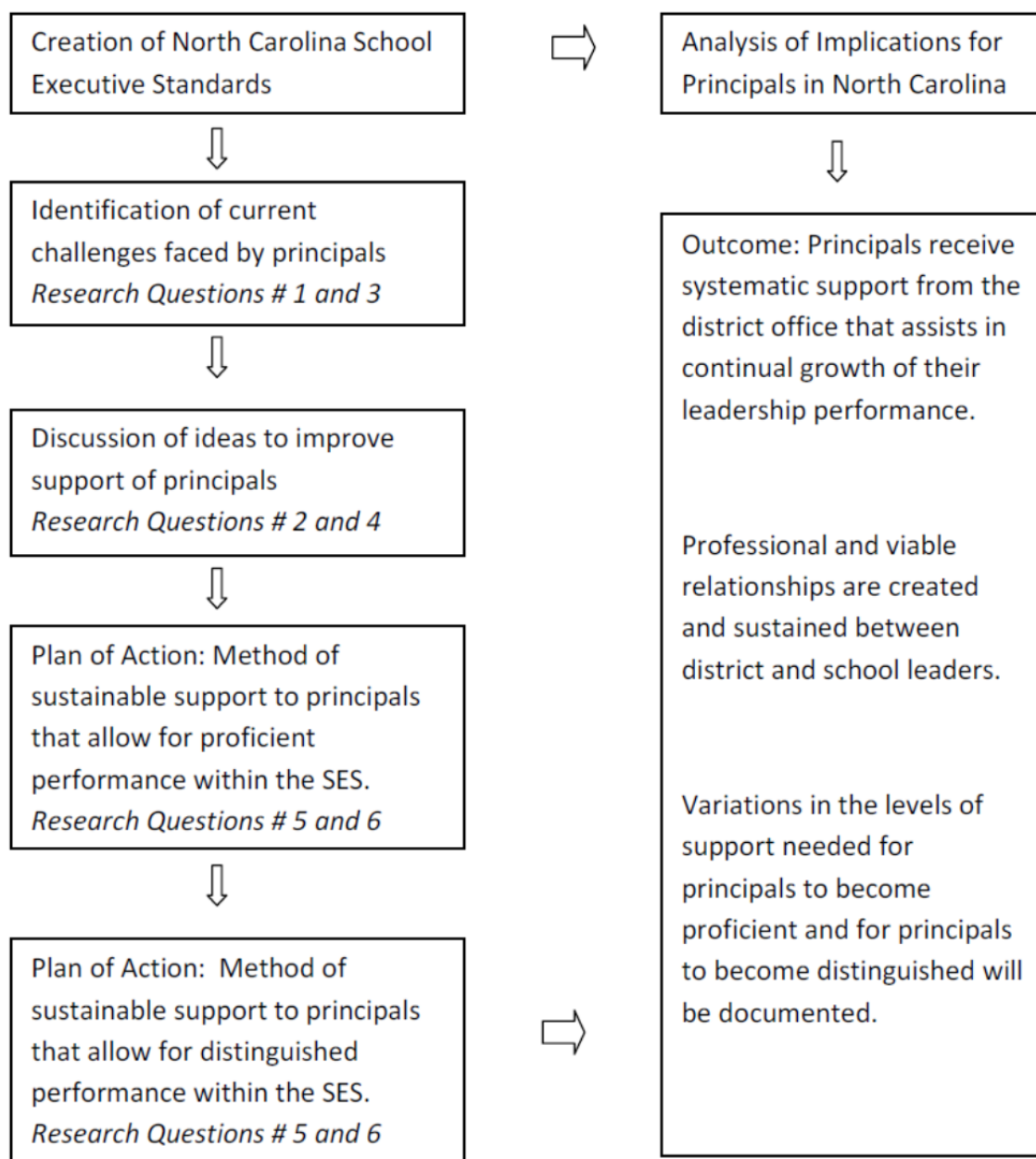


Figure 6. Conceptual Framework with Research Questions

A qualitative methodology was used to acquire my needed data. Participants in my research consisted of two groups. Central office employees and principals were interviewed from the same school district. Five central office employees were interviewed. These individuals had direct or indirect supervisory responsibilities for principals in the district. Seven principals were interviewed. These individuals worked in various academic levels of the Pre-K through 12 district. Participants in the study covered the spectrum of experience from a first year principal to a district administrator with more than 35 years on the job. Each administrator was interviewed once for approximately 90 minutes at a predetermined setting within the district. All participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts from their interviews for member checking purposes.

The Redwood County Schools district served approximately 14,000 students in 26 schools. Approximately 2,000 employees worked within the school system. The district was located in the northern-central region of North Carolina. Redwood County Schools had experienced academic success in the district with respectable gains in test scores and graduation rates. Although located in a rural area with high unemployment and poverty rates, the district reported significant progress made with their students.

It was important for visuals that organize the seven leadership functions as well as the actual evaluation process to be available to each person interviewed. Since I planned to assess different levels of support needed for proficient and distinguished performance standards, characteristics of each must be clearly identified. While the visuals provided did not serve as a script, they allowed those interviewed to reference the specific

language used by the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE). The documents that were presented to those interviewed are included in Appendixes A and B.

As principals and central office staff provided feedback regarding the types of professional development and support needed, I documented their responses through the use of matrices that aligned to the proficient and distinguished performance levels of the SES (see Appendix C). The use of these charts allowed me to efficiently record their responses and link them to the relevant leadership function that was referenced. Trend data surfaced at the completion of all interviews that revealed consistencies and inconsistencies of the types of support needed by principals in both levels of performance ratings.

Justification of Research from Literature

Portin et al. (2003) stated that “for principals to succeed, their authority and responsibility have to be inextricably linked” (p. 41). His study of principals determined that principals must be provided a match of authority and freedom of action with the responsibilities demanded of them by central office. Portin proposed seven core leadership functions that principals must be able to perform as a school leader. While these seven functions are distinct, they are not silos, as they closely connect in the daily practice of school administration. Portin expressed principals’ strengths and weaknesses must be considered by the district office in order to not only appropriately place them in a suitable school but to also support them in the areas of need. A call for intensive assistance and communication from the school district level underlies Portin’s

recommendations that principals must be given a framework of support that allows for their responsibilities to be met.

The Southern Regional Education Board (2001) stated that one of the thirteen critical success factors for effective principals is to “obtain support from central office . . . for their school improvement agenda” (p. 4). This study of best practices by districts and universities to prepare aspiring principals also recommended that school districts “provide district-funded opportunities for continuing leadership development” (p. 10). The SREB posed four guiding questions that led their quest to determine if effective support and preparation was in place for soon to be and recently appointed school administrators. Results called for reform across the spectrum of support agencies including those at the district office. One of the findings revealed a need for districts to view leadership development as a “long-term process and commit time, talent, and resources to the work” (p. 27).

The Charlotte Advocates for Education (2004) also provided input on the lack of principal preparation and support. Findings from principal interviews indicated a perceived lack of resources and learning opportunities among school leaders in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The CAE pointed out a need for increased support as, “principals are the crucial element in the school. Therefore, having high quality on-going continuous leadership development that is appropriately funded is a necessity” (p. 16). The advocacy group additionally added that a specific list of skills and information needed by principals to adequately perform their roles should be provided by the district office. Furthermore, strategies to meet these requirements should also follow.

These sources not only called for an increase in continuous support and professional development for principals, they also assisted in the creation of the North Carolina School Executive Standards. The seven leadership functions that principals must meet proficiently and aspire to distinguished performance are partially based on the works of Portin, the SREB, and the CAE. From interviews of principals and those who prepare them have emerged a need for better communication between the two parties as well as an increase in support. Now more than ever, this need is apparent with the recent implementation of the new School Executive Standards.

This further intensifies the correlation of the School Executive Standards to the challenges that principals and district leaders face when attempting to successfully operate in all leadership functions. A natural progression develops from the comprehension of the standard's founding documents and derived expectations to the need for these challenges to be addressed.

These studies have laid the groundwork for me to further research the actual support structure that central office should provide to principals. Having seven specific leadership strands to guide my field work will expose principals' needs in each function as well as how support should be transformed to assist them. My interviews with principals and district staff will be structured around the actual standards for school leaders that were formed from the supportive research.

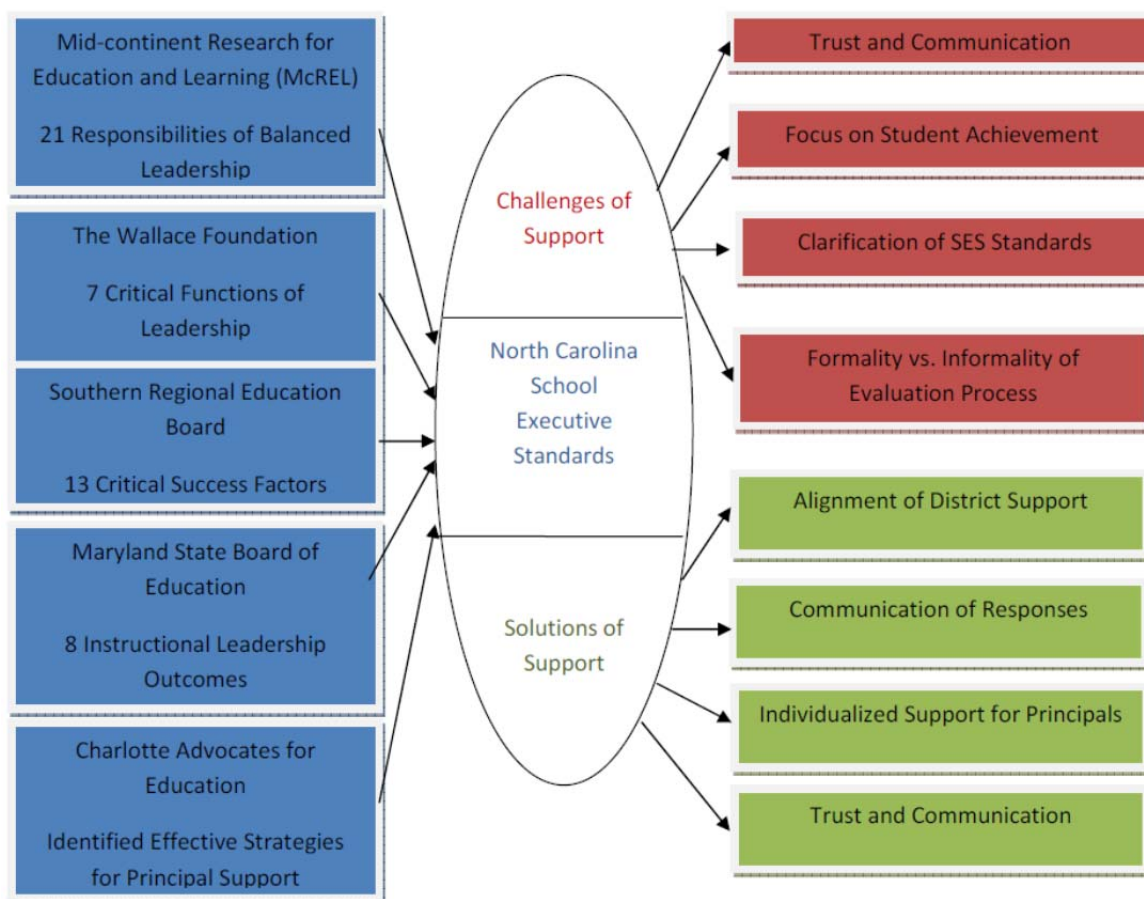


Figure 7. Correlation of Research Procedures and Findings

It was my hope that a qualitative study would yield explicit data from principals and district administrators that revealed the specific leadership needs of school principals and the ideas for improvement from central office. My approach was to isolate my interviews of each group to one school district. My intentions were to become engrained with the inner workings of the district at both the school and district level. A core component of my research related to relationships in place between the two groups to be interviewed. Were avenues of communication in place? How did the culture of the district spill over into daily practices of support and interaction between principals and

central office? Residing my research in one district provided a clearer and more intimate picture of how these two parties currently interacted and what still needed to be in place for success within the North Carolina School Executive Standards.

Allowing for open-ended discussion by principals and district staff during interviews encouraged candid responses that elicited actual thoughts for leadership improvement. With only the seven leadership standards, evaluation rubric, and the evaluation process as guides for discussion, each person interviewed had the autonomy to provide unlimited feedback. My interview process was designed to collect firsthand information about the limitations and struggles that principals faced. The process also attempted to allow district administrators the opportunity to discuss ideas that would alleviate these challenges through their own perspective as a mechanism of support. These types of desired responses were most efficiently gathered through unlimited responses related to each leadership function.

Participants in my study signed an approved consent form that documents their willingness to participate in the interview process and research. Each person was interviewed once for approximately 90 minutes. They were all briefed about the purpose of the study and my intentions with the collected data. Interviews took place at a mutually agreeable setting that allowed for privacy. Benefits to the participants included the opportunity to share input on additional support needed in their roles, a chance to be reflective on best practices needed to be successful, and the potential opportunity to positively impact the working relationship between school and district leadership. While confidentiality during the interview was assured to each participant, a minimal risk was

present considering that both principals and their supervisors were asked questions relating to levels of support that were desired. All collected data was secured after the interview process to further provide privacy for each participant.

Digitized audiotapes were used to record each interview session. These records also remained secure throughout the research process. They were destroyed within thirty days of completion of the research. Certificates of confidentiality were signed by external transcription companies that transcribed all recorded interviews. These documents were also secured while analyzing the collected data and were destroyed appropriately. A copy of each transcription was sent to the respective participant for credibility purposes. As part of this member checking process, each participant was given the opportunity to review the decoded transcript. A follow up conversation occurred with each participant. They were asked the following questions during the member check.

1. Does the transcription accurately reflect what you said?
2. Is there anything that you would like to have removed from the transcript?
3. Is there anything you would like to add to the transcript?
4. After reflecting on your comments, in what ways was this interview helpful to your profession?

Data analysis required the sorting of comments and input from all participants. Since I was interested in discovering the needs of principals and the method of support offered by central office, I carefully organized all statements into categories that indicated levels of capacity for effectiveness as they linked to the seven leadership functions of the North Carolina School Executive Standards. Identifying helpful

strategies offered by the district with the needs indicated by principals provided a match process that could be potentially replicated to maximize a prescriptive structure of support. Additionally, I also analyzed how supportive strategies were implemented and what impact they had on improving professional relationships between central office and principals. Are the most effective interventions carried out from top-down directives and with explicit instructions? In contrast, are the most helpful strategies offered through collaboration with few limitations on creative implementation within each school? Identification of the most effective means of support from the district as well as the techniques most well received by principals were both integral components that emerged from the data analysis.

Subjectivities of the study possibly included my past experience as a public school principal and my current experience as a district office administrator. These roles were identical to both types of research participants who were interviewed. Certainly, I had my own beliefs about the types and amount of support that should be offered to principals. Having served in that capacity, I recalled moments that I felt ostracized and abandoned by the district office. However, I had also experienced moments of gratitude for the overwhelming support received from district supervisors. I had to remember that significant moments must not skew my perception of the study and also had to acknowledge that a pattern of support or lack thereof is to be discovered – not individual's specific accounts from their professional past.

My current role as a district office administrator created subjectivities due to the findings potentially exposing my weaknesses in reference to principal support.

Undoubtedly, there have been incidents that I did not offer optimal support to principals as a district supervisor. I remained objective when listening to scenarios that could possibly force me to take the side of the district due to my current professional status. Furthermore, I could not judge or assess the principal's abilities during the interview based on my prior experiences. If I judged a principal's qualities based on my observations during the interview, I would have failed to remain objective and altered his or her opportunity to describe their view of district level support.

I avoided potential subjectivities by visiting a school system where I had never been employed and was not familiar with any of the participants. I also recorded the conversations during the interviews, transcribed, and coded them in order to avoid subjective conclusions being made during our interactions. Coding allowed me to remain objective and consistent throughout the research process. Asking only the questions that I prepared also guaranteed that my subjectivity did not redirect the interviews. Having the data transcribed and coded also promoted the trustworthiness of my findings to external readers.

It was my hope that a specific action plan could be developed for district level employees to reference as they attempt to support principals who must meet all seven leadership functions of the School Executive Standards. Strategies of support emerged that could potentially serve as a framework for action within districts. This study also revealed current practices that do not benefit the professional growth of principals, and in fact limit their ability to become distinguished school leaders.

The methodology of this study provided an environment to collect qualitative data that provided insight to various viewpoints regarding support of educational leaders. The findings produced from the study contribute to the identification of obstacles experienced by a school system when trying to provide support for principals and how to possibly overcome these challenges.

Limitations

This study was limited to one school district with intentions of intimately learning the culture and relationships between school and district administrators. This individual setting greatly benefitted the qualitative inquiry approach. However, similar studies should be conducted in other districts to correlate the discovered needs with the Redwood County Schools. Further research of this kind would support the documented implications for sustainable strategies of support.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The North Carolina School Executive Standards determine a principal's documented success and areas that must be improved. I inquired about the types of support principals will need from their district administrators to meet the expectations of the executive standards. Furthermore, how does this support vary as principals grow to distinguished levels of performance? Six principals from various grade levels and five district administrators were thoroughly interviewed within the Redwood School System to identify the support that was currently offered and should be offered in each leadership function.

Interviews were conducted at each principal's school and at the office of each district administrator. Each participant was given a copy of the North Carolina School Executive Standards and the evaluation process. The interview process lasted approximately 90 minutes. Those interviewed were walked through each leadership standard and asked to discuss how support was offered or needed in order for principals to maintain a proficient rating while moving towards distinguished marks. They were also asked to discuss the needed levels of support regarding the evaluation process that district administrators and principals should follow.

Input from participants was qualitative and specifically spoke to how proficient leaders were supported while proposing what more could be done to become

distinguished in each leadership function. Principals and district administrators were asked to discuss these differentiated levels of support with minimal parameters. This provided an extensive view of one district's leadership environment as well as the relationships in place between school and central office leaders.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and decoded for purposes of confidentiality. Copies of the interviews were sent to participants to verify validity of the documents and to provide an opportunity for further discussion, if needed. This member checking process allowed those interviewed to reflect on their responses and communicate any additional statements or retractions that may have surfaced. See Table 3 for a list of all participants, their roles in the Redwood County School District, and the location of their work. Names of participants and schools are pseudonyms.

Table 3

Participants and Affiliations

Participant	Position	Location
Cody Price	Principal	Randville High School
Aaron Rogers	Principal	Railville Middle School
Rhonda Freeze	Principal	Morgan Elementary School
Sandy Cooper	Principal	Redwood County Middle School
Jill Nesbit	Principal	Lester Spring Elementary School
Tessa Patton	Principal	Harrison Elementary School

Table 3 (cont.)

Participant	Position	Location
Roger Simpson	Superintendent	Redwood County Central Office
Nancy Hooper	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction	Redwood County Central Office
Kal Sharpe	Director of Middle Schools	Redwood County Central Office
Bobby Hargrove	Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services	Redwood County Central Office
Jason Craven	Director of Human Resources	Redwood County Central Office

Discovering strategies of support needed by principals and offered by district administrators required in depth conversations with both groups of professionals. A walkthrough of the School Executive Standards during the interview process allowed each individual to share his or her experiences regarding supportive leadership practices. Since the discussion was crafted to determine how principals could advance from proficient to distinguished levels of performance, a contrast of the support that was in place and the advanced support that was needed could be documented throughout the SES strands. My intent was to document these supportive strategies that maintain proficient performance and identify the additional types of support needed to become distinguished in each leadership standard.

Discussing the School Executive Standards with principals and district administrators revealed a need for clarity of the document and the actual evaluation process. What do proficient and distinguished levels of performance really mean? The

need to answer this question quickly developed during the interview process. Principals and district staff fully understood the actions needed to perform their duties as well as what additional strategies of support would benefit their roles. However, a prescriptive link to the actual SES indicators for each standard and performance rating was not as evident. I hoped to identify these challenges that both school and district administrators face within a standards-driven evaluation system.

In summary, each of the seven leadership strands revealed very unique levels of support that would be needed to advance principals to distinguished levels. However, trends of these findings emerged that encompass all strands of the School Executive Standards. The following list summarizes the findings from the fieldwork.

- Confusion of how a proficient rating differs from a distinguished rating
- A desired balance of leadership autonomy and intensive district support
- An overwhelming focus on student achievement that depleted support elsewhere
- Variation of support directly links to the individual needs of a principal
- Alignment of support from the district benefits a principal's ability to grow
- Support can be informal or formal depending on the area of need
- Areas of growth must be identified and supported with professional development

Strategic Leadership

Standard 1 of the SES (NCSBE, 2008) challenges school administrators to “create conditions that result in strategically re-imagining the school’s vision, mission, and goals in

the 21st century” (p. 6). Principals are expected to be the stimulus for leading change while distributing leadership opportunities to others within the school. Relative artifacts, performance data, and input from the community should all be utilized to collaboratively establish a strategic plan for continuous improvement. Principals were asked to identify the types of support that assisted them to maintain a proficient level of performance in regards to the SES. They were also asked to discuss additional support that may help them become distinguished in this leadership function.

A consistent initial response from principals involved open lines of communication with district administrators. All principals believed that they could call, email, or personally visit any of their district administrators and find support. Strategic planning is never a quick process, according to one principal interviewed, so ongoing lines of communication must be in place at a minimum. Monthly meetings were also frequently mentioned as a proficient level of support due to having a collaborative setting with their peers along with district supervisors in attendance. Having a strategic agenda at monthly meetings was also noted as important to principals. Principal Sandy Cooper explained,

The thing I feel like our system does a very good job of is taking those principal meetings and saying, okay, now remember these are the goals of our school system. These initiatives are listed in your school improvement plans. What are you doing? Sometimes, what other people are doing is really good . . . and you just want to piggyback on what they are doing. Maybe you don't want to re-create the wheel, you just want to borrow the wheel. It's great because you are getting real solid support that way.

In addition, an elementary school principal, Rhonda Freeze, explained that it is the school administrator's responsibility to be the strategic leader, not the district. While opportunities for collaboration is needed and valued, she appreciated the autonomy to make site-based decisions that would impact her school's strategic plan. "I've kind of been left to figure it out for myself and that's a good thing because every school is different and I tend to take more ownership over that when I know it's a growth area for me or for the school."

A balance seemed to be desired that combined opportunities for idea sharing as well as the autonomy to make a final decision at each school site. Principals seemed to want these on an as-needed basis which requires the district staff to be in tune with each principal's strengths, areas of improvement, and vision for their schools. All principals realized the importance of the Strategic Leadership standard and described it as the primary focus of school leadership. "I think strategic leadership just really drives almost everything that you're doing . . ." was shared by middle school principal, Sandy Cooper.

Exploring supportive strategies that could advance principals to a distinguished level in strategic leadership was a more challenging task. The primary obstacle was principals' uncertainty of how distinguished performance greatly differed from proficient performance. Each principal was given the opportunity to review the SES rubric for each performance level. After familiarizing themselves with each level, ideas for improvement began to be generated. Several principals did not call for a different type of support, but simply more of the same. More opportunities to meet with colleagues were a common request that could potentially benefit principals' ability to strategically lead their schools.

Other school administrators asked for more purposeful meetings. “Instead of information download, maybe more strategies to get you to lead change through strategic goals would be helpful.” In addition, Principal Tessa Patton also stated:

I think the district modeling the strategic process would very much help all principals . . . and when I say modeling that process, I think the district has to also have collaborative processes in a shared vision. I’m not really sure how involved I feel in that process district-wide.

District administrators were also interviewed to determine what support should be offered for principals to be proficient and to become distinguished leaders. In regards to strategic leadership, central office staff viewed their roles similarly and focused on supportive communication to principals. “Central office is a support group and that’s the way we have to see ourselves. We’re a service group to the schools and to the principals.” This philosophy was expressed by Assistant Superintendent Bill Hargrove in and was also repeated by other district staff during their interviews. Another common thread observed was establishing a level of trust with principals so they know it is acceptable to experiment with their strategic plans. The superintendent, Roger Simpson commented: “The biggest thing I think for us is being able to let the principals know that they can try risk. . . . it’s okay to take a risk with trying new things . . . outside the box.”

The topic of school improvement frequently arose with principals as well as district staff. It was evident that a clear strategic mission was in place to academically advance students. School Improvement Plans served as a catalyst for strategic planning. District administrators mentioned using this document as a guide in monthly meetings just as the principals discussed. As the superintendent explained, School Improvement

Plans guide interactions with principals and allow conversations to be prescriptive. “What is your mission? Do you know where you want to go? Are there goals that you have set academically and non-academically? How are you meeting those?”

Central office staff placed extreme value on the use of data to drive strategic planning. This was noted as a strength of the district and data implementation was credited in proficient levels of principal leadership. A data focus was also believed to be a strategy to empower principals to become distinguished. Principals were required to provide monitoring updates on the progress of goals, to readjust, and to keep their eyes on the district’s mission.

Consistency of support received and support offered was noted throughout the interviews regarding the Strategic Leadership strand. However, district leaders were quick to note areas that could be improved when supporting principals to become distinguished in this function. Those interviewed from the district office were reflective in their support practices and offered significant insight to what could be improved to advance principals in strategic leadership. These areas of improvement were also sparked as district leaders reviewed the SES characteristics for distinguished leadership during the interview. Regarding strategic leadership, the Director of Middle Schools, Kal Sharpe explained,

I think it’s one that we pass over a little bit too quickly because everybody thinks that proficient says needs and implements a process for developing a shared vision. I think a lot of times we think just because we have a mission statement on the wall that that is sufficient. And I think that’s one of the things we pass over and we don’t pay enough attention to . . . I think we have just fulfilled probably the letter of the law, but haven’t really gotten to the spirit of really galvanizing the

staff behind a particular purpose or vision; a particular idea about what your school could or should be.

The possibility of only “following the letter of the law” indicates that distinguished leadership is perceived to demand much more from principals and the district than what is currently in place. Although both groups that were interviewed agreed that communication and autonomy to be creative were strengths, shedding light on the SES’s definition of distinguished strategic leadership allowed for reflection on potential areas of improvement.

Whether or not principals understood the expectations of distinguished strategic leadership was also questioned. Assistant Superintendent, Nancy Hooper believed that more needs to be done to assist principals in better comprehending the evaluation tool. The responsibility to do so lies at the district level.

I think that support is required from central office in developing strategic leadership. There needs to be some professional development with principals . . . that is a process that I think most principals struggle with . . . I think to get to distinguished, a principal needs to know what it looks like and then they have to be able to assess where they are and the steps it’s going to take to their school to get there.

Conversations with both principals and district staff indicated that thoughtful efforts were in place to support principals as strategic leaders. Consistent communication, an allowance for principals’ creativity, high expectations for data analysis, and an ongoing focus of the district’s mission are qualities that most administrators listed as strengths of the system. The prescriptive nature of the actual School Executive Standards challenges both principals and district staff to reach beyond these actions and strive for a

climate of inquiry and continual renewal of core values and beliefs. The Strategic Leadership standard lists suggested artifacts for a district to consider when accomplishing this task. Interviews within the district reveal that these artifacts are being used and discussed on a frequent basis. Those include the School Improvement Plan, student achievement data, mission statements, and shared decision making. All of these were discussed by both groups and were regarded as successful tools to become better strategic leaders.

Instructional Leadership

Standard 2 of the SES (NCSBE, 2008) requires principals to “be knowledgeable of best instructional and school practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school . . .” (p. 8). Principals must have a clear focus on teaching and learning, how instructional time is spent, establishing a collaborative work environment, and developing a school culture and identity. Principals were asked to explain how they receive support in this crucial leadership function at a proficient level and also what further support could be offered, if any, to advance to a distinguished level of instructional leadership.

All principals that were interviewed in the Redwood School System believed that the Instructional Leadership standard was the primary focus of the district. In addition, they believed that levels of support from central office were intensive in this strand. Principal Sandy Cooper stated, “They do a really great job. I really think this is probably our strongest suit. I would say this instructional piece is probably the most important piece that they concentrate on.”

Another common thread noted in principal interviews was the involvement of the entire school district in instructional leadership. Not only principals were expected to be instructional leaders, but teachers, instructional coaches, and district personnel were to do so as well. Cooper explained, “Everyone’s touching instruction and I think that’s extremely important.” This all inclusive approach to instructional leadership also intends to connect instructional expertise vertically along grade levels. Cody Price, a high school principal commented,

The focus of instructional time—our district has really put a concerted effort into making all of our schools at each level, elementary, middle, and high schools . . . similar in terms of schedules . . . in order to allow this whole district-wide focus on instructional time to be the prominent theme.

It is important to note that the terms, “proficient” and “distinguished” were not frequently mentioned by principals when asked to describe the levels of support offered to maintain a proficient rating in the instructional standard. It was clearly believed that Redwood placed a high priority on instructional leadership and a sentiment was present that principals believed their district was advancing in this area. When asked what additional support could be offered to advance them from proficient to distinguished instructional leaders, clarification was needed to compare the two rating levels. Similar to the process in our strategic leadership conversation, the SES document proved to be a helpful resource for principals to answer this question. As suggestions for more focused district support developed, it could be proposed that there is a need for clarity in terms of how the North Carolina State Board of Education defines the various ratings within the

SES. Specifically, what does proficient instructional leadership look like and how does it differ from distinguished instructional leadership?

It should again be stated that principals in Redwood felt strongly supported in the Instructional Leadership standard. However, reviewing distinguished indicators within the SES ratings prompted principals to examine their individual roles as instructional leaders. The SES indicators for distinguished levels of performance require principals to be the leader of instructional discussions, the creator of instructional schedules, and the developer of a shared vision. While support was available from the district to improve instruction within their schools, some principals asked for more individual support to meet this standard. Price explained;

I guess we're not really viewed as much as the key instructional leader in the school anymore, because all of our reliance on the lead teachers, and things of that nature . . . and sometimes this is something I really miss . . . I do enjoy the curriculum and staff development that goes along with that. But it seems as if those things are being directed more towards our lead teachers than principals. So I do think that's one thing our district could do a better job of.

While the district was credited for aligning instructional improvement throughout all schools, one principal noted that she should have more autonomy in leading her individual school instructionally based on the SES indicator that requires her to be the leader of the school's professional learning community. When asked if she is required to implement distinct initiatives and build ownership among her staff, she commented, "Oh yeah, whether it fits or not." Instructional initiatives were believed to be non-negotiable by this principal, although she did explain that she was given the autonomy to make the initiative work within her school. Another principal explained, "I guess it's really about

our imagination when it comes to these . . . I mean what we want is to put our own stamp and thumbprint on it.”

The need for professional development was requested by an elementary principal as a support to become distinguished in instructional leadership. Tessa Patton suggested “putting time into the calendar for professional development days . . . having those early release days for site-based development is something they can do.” This could serve as a possible solution to absorbing district-wide initiatives and customizing them to fit each school.

The importance of this study intensified when principals became more reflective about the types of support needed to professionally advance in the SES model.

Instructional leadership is unarguably a driving force in all districts and principals in Redwood certainly expressed their recognition of the district’s focus and actions to improve this standard. They also recognized that the SES are intense and collaboration will be needed to determine how principals can be assisted in advancement. Principal Cooper summarized this issue of district support by explaining, “Going back to this instrument, (SES) nobody has said particularly, “oh, this is what we’re going to do for you,” but they have really supported us and helped us.”

District staff members were also interviewed to determine how they can help principals be proficient instructional leaders and how to further their skills to become distinguished. At a minimum, central office administrators believed that their core role was to keep principals focused on instruction by alleviating the many other tasks that face them. The Director for Middle Schools, Kal Sharpe expressed,

One of the things that people who've never been a principal don't understand when they talk about instructional leadership is that every principal would absolutely love to get out of their car in the morning and be an instructional leader for the rest of the day. What they find is that there's almost no way to plan your day if you're the principal.

The respect for the principal's seat and the need to support them so they can remain instructionally focused was a shared belief at the district level. Since all district administrators who were interviewed were once principals, there was a genuine effort to protect them. The Assistant Superintendent for Auxiliary Services, Bobby Hargrove believed, "our role is to help them be able to handle all of these things and stay focused on instructional leadership, because that is . . . that should be our main focus."

The Superintendent also agreed that central office must guide and protect the principals in the district. His quarterly meetings with all principals serve as a time to refocus and to remind principals of their primary purpose. Dr. Simpson stated, "I think the quarterly talks with principals are critical . . . that's really a time when they really sit down and we talk to them . . . what are the issues here?"

From a proficient standpoint of instructional leadership, the majority of support offered from central office revolved around assistance with managerial tasks that would potentially assist the principal in focusing on instruction. Offering support staff that was skilled in curriculum also was a strategy of support. Just as the principals mentioned, central office staff spoke about the instructional coaches that were deployed to schools in an effort to instructionally benefit the school administrator. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Nancy Hooper explained,

Our principals are generalists and they have teacher leaders that help them with the very specific core content areas . . . so I think that helps them do a very good job of providing professional development for our teachers, which allows our principals to be a part of that so they're learning and are able to get the information they need.

This indirect instructional support from the district arrived through support staff that benefited instructional improvement. However, the SES challenges the principals themselves to become the instructional leader as a distinguished administrator. District personnel were asked to view the SES indicators for distinguished levels of success and generate possible strategies to better support their principals. Similar to the principals' responses, the need for the principals to be viewed as the instructional leaders and how to get them there became the focus of the interviews.

The Director for Human Resources, Jason Craven expressed concern regarding the professional development opportunities for principals. "When you become a principal, you get stuck in that little box." Craven suggested opportunities for principals to see a wider scope of the instructional improvement process that exceeded a principal's view from one school building. This was suggested for assistant principals as well since most aspire to be principals. "And so the idea is we continually educate people on the changes . . . and we don't do that necessarily at the administrative level." Assistant Superintendent Hooper supported the need for learning opportunities.

That's where I think we have got to do a better job in terms of helping principals. I go into a classroom . . . what I see, how I provide that feedback to the teacher so that I start to see what I want to see in the classroom . . . How do I know what to look for? We have to help principals identify what they are looking for and then be able to provide feedback.

A review of the Instructional Leadership standards confirmed that support was in place for principals and was viewed as helpful and consistent. An analysis of distinguished levels of support for this function caused those interviewed to reflect on the accuracy of the support to benefit principals as instructional leaders. While principals valued the support that indirectly benefited their advancement as instructional leaders, a request was made to more directly benefit this function.

Cultural Leadership

Standard 3 of the SES (NCSBE, 2008) challenges principals to “support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future” (p. 9). Principals must establish collaborative work environments that facilitate the ongoing design of the school’s goals and mission. Redwood County principals were asked to discuss the levels of support offered from the district that allowed them to proficiently perform these tasks. They were also asked to identify additional support that may help them become distinguished cultural leaders.

Cultural leadership can be considered a pivotal standard for principals due to the many stakeholders that make up a school community and that affect its identity. Principals who were interviewed had similar responses when asked about the type of support needed in this leadership strand. Primarily, school administrators believed that minimal support could be offered from central office and the principal must take ownership of this function. Aaron Rogers, a middle school principal stated, “I don’t know

if central office can necessarily help you . . . to know your staff . . . or having the pulse on your staff.” Jill Nesbit, an elementary principal added;

I think there’s only a certain degree that central office can give you as far as culture because you have to live it. You can’t know it from the outside until you’re living here every day. So they have a limited view of the culture.

The desire for autonomy in Standard 3 was also a common theme in the principal interviews. Several school administrators commented that they must have the ability to craft the culture of their school without abiding by a template from the district. Principal Tessa Patton interjected, “administrators just need to know their school well enough to know when to celebrate and when those kinds of thing need to happen.” Principal Rhonda Freeze added, “You either do it for yourself and your school or you don’t.” A sense of possession was gathered from the principal interviews regarding cultural leadership. Since every school has a diverse climate and culture that can differ greatly, principals in the cohort adamantly preferred to make these leadership decisions autonomously without the direction of the district. Principals concluded that the Redwood County central office allowed for their ownership of this standard. Principal Patton described district leaders as being available on an “as needed basis” for cultural leadership.

For this particular strand, district leaders were credited for helping principals to become distinguished by maintaining a consultative role. Principal Cody Price explained that “the advocacy and empowerment . . . that’s been a big strength of our district, that’s been a real central theme in our district.” To clarify, principals did not necessarily label

themselves as distinguished in this standard, but did believe that central office offered the appropriate support to help them get there. The only suggestion for improvement was a structured Professional Learning Community, or PLC, that would allow for a cohort of principals to share ideas about building cultural leadership capacity. This would also entail having the opportunity to visit schools of their colleagues to observe the climate and cultural environment.

A disconnect emerged in conversations with principals related to what distinguished cultural leadership really meant. Various factors skewed their definition such as length of their principalship within a school, previous leadership experiences prior to becoming a principal, and simply being the right match for a school community. A middle school principal in her first year at the school was previously an elementary principal and had resided there for numerous years. She noted that becoming a distinguished cultural leader cannot occur instantaneously. Time is needed to build trust with a community, regardless of one's ability to relate to the staff. While she may have considered herself distinguished at her elementary school, she would rate herself lower as a first year middle school principal.

Principals also seemed more concerned with their own perception of their cultural leadership abilities than those of central office staff. It was evident that high levels of ownership existed among the principals and they saw it as their responsibility to find ways to improve in this standard. Since central office staff is charged with evaluating principals, it could be proposed that district leaders should not be expected to provide intensive support to school leaders in this function based on the feedback from the

principals interviewed. It is feasible that allowing for autonomy and “as needed” guidance to serve as the strategies of support is appropriate to enhance principals’ success to distinguished levels.

District leaders were also asked to identify what support they have offered and could further offer to principals as they strived for distinguished cultural leadership. Their answers were parallel to principal responses, agreeing that principals were solely charged with the task of establishing a successful school climate. However, a sense of responsibility to model this leadership standard for principals was discovered. Assistant Superintendent Hooper commented that;

the most important thing for me in developing cultural leadership is modeling. I don’t think cultural leadership is intuitive. I do think it takes time and I think you have to be willing to be attacked and then reflect. And I think that’s the hardest thing to learn is to go home and say “these are the 15 things people said I did wrong today. Now let’s reflect on what I think about that and how I can make some of those perceptions go away?” And realizing you are contributing to the culture of the school, whether intentionally or unintentionally, with every decision that you make and every behavior that you make.

The need to clarify the Cultural Leadership standard was also documented from conversations with central office staff. The SES have provided a framework to the Redwood School System but Hooper called into question the district’s success in following the expectations prescriptively.

Principals have to have time to go through the standards and I truly don’t know that we ever did that; I mean I went through the training, but really go through the document and say under each standard what does this mean, and identify the behaviors that go along with being proficient and what is being distinguished. So if I were to observe you, what does it look like to build a sense of efficacy and

empowerment? What behavior would I see? And then reflect on their behaviors and see where they fall in the continuum.

This interactive dialogue with principals referenced by Hooper exemplifies the modeling process needed to more intensively understand the expectations of distinguished cultural leadership. Although agreement exists between principals and the district that school leaders need autonomy to establish a collaborative school environment, Hooper's description of modeling reflective thinking for principals could result in more intensive district support that will lead to distinguished performance in this standard.

Human Resource Leadership

Standard 4 of the SES (NCSBE, 2008) requires principals to “ensure that the school is a professional learning community” and to “ensure that process and systems are in place which results in recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development, and retention of high performing staff” (p. 10). Within these tasks, principals are expected to involve teachers in the collaborative planning process to build and sustain efficacy among the school community. Selected principals of the Redwood School System were asked to identify the support needed to be proficient in this standard as well as additional support to become distinguished.

The words, “Human Resource” prompted many principals to begin their responses by discussing personnel matters. Since the state of North Carolina recently adopted a new teacher evaluation model, these principals expressed their challenges to understand and implement it. The school system was currently in year one of the new teacher evaluation model. Principal Nesbit commented that central office “gave us the

materials to do the orientations. They explained it to us very well and had some people who were trained to be experts explain it to our teachers and try to reduce the anxiety that they experienced.” The distribution of information from the district level was rated highly by principals and most were pleased that liaisons were in place to help them and their teachers adapt to a new evaluation process.

The implementation of the new teacher evaluation model was an area that lacked strong support from district leaders. Although the district had provided staff development on what the new model looked like, some principals were unsure as to how to use this tool in their daily affairs. Principal Patton explained, “We have had training on the new North Carolina Teacher Evaluation. I’m not going to say it was the most effective training . . . I felt less than prepared for what I had to do this year with teachers.” There was also a call for the district to personalize the new evaluation system to the Redwood District rather than simply adopt the tool as it was presented by the North Carolina State Board of Education. Principal Cooper described this need by requesting “some uniform forms or some templates by which our school district can take to our teachers and say okay, we’re going to follow this because it’s good practice and because it makes sense.”

A need for more intensive professional development regarding teacher evaluation was frequently requested by principals in order to advance them to distinguished levels in the Human Resource leadership strand. There was an evident level of discomfort with this new tool as expressed by Principal Price. “I know that none of us have felt real comfortable with this new teacher instrument. I think a lot of that is because we don’t fully understand our own instrument . . . I do think that’s something we could focus more

on, maybe in some of our principal meetings.” Price pointed out that not only does confusion surround the new teacher evaluation tool but the School Executive Standards as well.

District administrators were asked to identify strategies of support in this function that enabled school principals to work towards a distinguished level of performance. Responses closely paralleled those from principals in a self-admittance that more should be done to educate school leaders about teacher and administrative evaluation tools. The Human Resources director commented, “One of the things we’re talking about doing next year is how to prepare our principals for that piece. As an administrator here for the last twelve years, I don’t recall anyone ever telling how to actually handle that piece of an evaluation or handling a staff member.”

The challenge of validating the difference between proficient and distinguished leadership arose again when discussing strategies of support within this function. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum spoke about the difference of these ratings:

I think that to be proficient, central office needs to be able to provide feedback . . . we have an expectation if you have submitted a request to hire a person and not only doing the background checks and in talking to the candidate—if there is some red flag we have an expectation to talk with you about why you have made that recommendation. Now I think when it comes to being distinguished, one of the expectations is that you have knowledge of your staff and you have aligned professional development, collaboration practices with the needs of your staff. So to me, that’s a significant jump from proficient to distinguished. We can always reflect on how to make that better, and sending clear messages, but principals have to understand the needs of their teachers and their staff. If they don’t understand the needs of their staff then it’s hard to make sure that they keep them.

Since a clear focus was placed on principals having to understand their staff's needs in order to provide them with support to grow, the concern among central office staff was to determine how to support principals in this task. Professional development opportunities were consistently referenced as the solution. While principals commented that they understood the evaluation tools but needed help implementing them, district leaders believed that better support could be offered in both areas. New processes can often be slow to take effect and even slower to be operational at a mastery level. The superintendent commented,

That's probably the hardest one because no matter how much we try to hold their (principals) hands and attach these training wheels that can be taken off, they would prefer you keep the training wheels on there because I think subconsciously they feel like that they're not taking the only ownership in it.

Superintendent Simpson believed that principals must reach a comfort level with evaluations in their schools using the new tool just as the district must become comfortable with the School Executive Standards.

Professional development to address these new tools was asked for by principals and was admitted as a need by the district. This agreement still had not produced what the professional development should entail. There was acknowledgement by both groups that a new process had caused confusion as to how appropriately rate teacher performance as well as how principals should be rated in their performance. It would be fair to state that the district was in a developing stage of addressing these challenges during the time of the interviews.

Managerial Leadership

Standard 5 of the SES (NCSBE, 2008) requires principals to “ensure that the school has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, problem-solving, communicating expectations and scheduling that result in organizing the work routines in the building” (p. 12). The strategic use of school resources and providing resolution to in-house conflicts through effective communication comprise the core work of principals in this leadership strand. Principals and district staff were asked to speak to the effective strategies of support in place and to discuss further areas of need as school leaders strived for distinguished ratings.

Principals clearly appreciated the autonomy given to them in this area of leadership. Similar to responses regarding the cultural function of the SES, principals believed that they owned the core responsibility of establishing effective management within their schools. Principal Patton commented, “I appreciate the autonomy given to me so I therefore can empower my staff by giving them the autonomy to make decisions that they feel are right for our school. Cause if someone’s always telling me what to do, I think that carries over into me always directing . . .”

Managerial Leadership often involves district staff due to parental concerns that arise if an agreement is not reached at the school level. This frequently involves disciplinary issues, athletics, and grading procedures, to name a few. Some principals spoke about the level of support received from the district when their decisions were called into question. Principal Price explained, “Our district really does look at everything as a win-win. I think that’s positive . . . and that’s what I’ve tried to do here in

every situation. Try to get the parents happy while still maintaining the support of the teachers and assistant principals.” He described the district’s actions of support as a model for what he should follow internally at his school.

An area of managerial leadership that needed attention from the district was handling the budget. Many principals explained that they minimally understood the district’s financial processes and requested additional support. A middle school principal, Aaron Rogers, stated, “I would say . . . more help is needed in terms of budget, school resources, and budget processes.” Several principals who had been in the Redwood District for numerous years as school administrators recalled only one professional development session designated for fiscal responsibility. One commented, “This is my sixth year as principal. I think we’ve had maybe one session on budget since I’ve been here and it’s something that definitely we’re in need of more support.”

Having autonomy to make decisions yet requesting direction and staff development within the same leadership strand emerged not only in this function of the SES, but others as well. The lines again became blurry when proficient ratings were compared to what it takes to become distinguished. Does proficient run parallel with having autonomy? Does an increase in training and professional development translate into distinguished leadership? It should be mentioned that each principal’s comfort zone with handling parental concerns, budget, etc. strongly factor into the perception of central office support. While autonomy is appreciated in areas that they feel skilled, it was noted that principals desired the guidance of the district when uncertainty of a task was present.

An individualized approach of support to each principal may be needed to address these variations of leadership abilities.

Input from district staff regarding the Managerial Leadership standard overwhelmingly placed the responsibility of this function on the principals of the school system. When asked what district support should like in this area, having an open-door policy for principals to ask questions, being visible in schools to relate to their challenges, and helping principals be reflective about their decisions were strategies listed to help principals become distinguished. From a proficient standpoint, central office staff believed that principals must have the leadership skill to make decisions and involve their supervisors when they need to collaborate. Assistant Superintendent Hargrove expressed,

So if I feel like a principal is calling me and asking me things that they should be making a decision on, I'll help them with it, but I'll tell them . . . you need to take the lead in that . . . if you're not portraying that leadership quality in front of those, then that's not helping you.

The Superintendent elaborated on the need for principals to own this leadership strand as well. He expressed that a principal's authority could be threatened if central office staff take the reins of decision-making at a school site.

I think for me, central office is here to make sure that the rules and regulations are followed and try to keep all the paperwork off the principals as much as we can. So if they come in here and tell me that they've got an issue, they're not going to leave their problem on my desk and then walk out the door and I call them back later and say, here's what you need to do. I'll talk it out with them and give them different scenarios, but I leave the ownership with them because when the decision is made, they should not be able to say, well the superintendent told me to do this, or the director told me to do this.

Encouraging principals to be on the front lines of managerial decision making could possibly be viewed as a lack of support. However, central office staff explained the importance of principals portraying the leadership role to the staff, stakeholders, and community within their school environment. A “coaching model” as explained by the Superintendent must be in place in this leadership strand that provides support without removing the principal’s authority to make building level decisions.

External Development Leadership

Principals are required by the SES (NCSBE, 2008) to “design structures and processes that result in community engagement, support and ownership” (p. 14). Responsibilities of this leadership strand include the creation of structures that facilitate community outreach and the development of protocols that comply with federal, state, and local mandates. Principals and central office staff of the Redwood School System were asked to speak to levels of support that were needed and that were offered in order for principals to move from proficient to distinguished in the SES performance ratings.

When principals were asked to talk about levels of support from the district that allowed them to operate at proficient levels of leadership, successful communication and structural processes from central office were discussed. Principals spoke highly of their supervisors’ efforts to filter state and federal updates to them on a consistent basis. Much of this communication involved memos about curriculum reform. Principal Price added, “We are proactive in our district, as far as the new curriculum initiatives and the core standards coming out. Our district is doing a good job of filtering those down to us as well.” A sense of understanding from the district was also noted in relation to the

complexity of the many mandates that arrive from state and federal entities. Middle school principal, Sandy Cooper explained, “Central office does a great job of saying, we know you’re not real excited about this, but we’re going to do everything we can to make it better. We can’t make it go away, but we can make it better.”

School administrators also believed that the Superintendent and his staff successfully provided a framework of operation within the district that promoted communication and collaboration with the School Board and the community. Principal Freeze discussed the complexity of the school system with its many stakeholders and the many challenges involved with having a systematic plan of action. The politics involved at the administrative level was also discussed. Principal Cooper credited central office for preparing principals in the district to know how to appropriately interact with the Board.

Politics is a crucial piece: knowing how to speak to your board members when they come into your building . . . how to react to them, not to say too much to them. And I will tell you this: Dr. Simpson’s been very clear that from day one, extremely clear. We are about running schools. They are not my boss. I answer directly to them, you answer to me. If they come into your school and they want to talk about a really hot board topic, I need to know what they’re talking to you about because it’s going to show up at the next board meeting. When he has his K-12 meeting with us, he’s very clear about what he wants us to talk about and what he doesn’t want us to talk about.

This type of direct support from central office is quite different in comparison to that offered in the managerial leadership function. While principals were given the autonomy to make decisions internal to their building and staff, the Superintendent gave direct instructions as to how to interact with the elected officials of the school system. In both instances, principals seemed to agree with the type of support offered.

Moving to a distinguished level of performance in the External Development standard requires principals to be proactive in developing relationships in the community and to be able to interpret initiatives created by the federal, state, and district levels. This requires more active participation in the development of the district's goals. Principals were asked to discuss what support was in place to help them do this and what other support may be needed.

Principals asked for more support from the district regarding community outreach. Several mentioned how difficult it could be to find the time to focus on this area of leadership due to the instructional focus that guided the school system. Although principals appreciated the specific expectations from the Superintendent regarding how to interact with the Board and community stakeholders, they still saw a need to strengthen community partnerships that would potentially benefit their individual schools. Principal Freeze shared, "If nothing else, having somebody in the district who knows what these support structures are . . . and knows the people who are willing to help. Here's how you go about doing it. Let's go out and solicit this." Principals also requested the opportunity to discuss successful ways that their colleagues have excelled in this standard. Allotting time to share ideas was needed along with guidance from the district as to where and how to focus their outreach within the community.

District staff also shared their input on the types of support they offered to principals in the External Development standard. They possessed a wider lens of perception to the importance of this function. They also acknowledged how difficult it is for principals to focus on this area due to the many mandates that are imposed that

demand higher test scores. The Director of Middle Schools, Kal Sharpe, believed that a better balance must be established for principals to become distinguished in this area.

It's very difficult to take a step back and look at the larger picture. And you get so involved in the minutia of benchmarks and data—this data file, that data file. How can I get this kid to increase a couple of points so he'll be proficient? You get so involved in the minutia that I think sometimes we lose the bigger intent, the bigger purpose of education.

Helping principals better understand the importance of external development was also discussed. Director Sharpe wanted to make building leaders realize that reaching out to the community does not always mean asking for money. “Principals may be stuck in the proficient area . . . because businesses are just seen as a source of money. I think their input would go a lot further than their money if we would take the time to . . . realize they were out there.”

Assistant Superintendent Hooper pointed out that principals who are distinguished in external development must be proactive. To her, this translates into being organized and being able to prioritize tasks.

I think being a principal means you have to be organized period. A lot of this goes back to what organizational style works best for me so that I can be efficient? So you have to know your principals . . . well enough to be able to provide strategies to them so that they are more organized and efficient because its managing a lot of information. They need to understand and be able to prioritize the information they are getting. You have to be intuitive enough to know that I need to tell my parents about this two or three weeks ahead of time so I head off any issues and so I'm not reacting to it.

Organizational skills could certainly benefit principals in all leadership strands, but

Hooper makes the argument that distinguished principals cannot wait and react to issues

that may arise in the community. They must be organized enough to think about what probably will happen and address those issues proactively.

Micro-political Leadership

The SES (NCSBE, 2008) requires principals to “build systems and relationships that utilize the staff’s diversity, encourage constructive ideological conflict in order to leverage staff expertise, power, and influence in order to realize the school’s vision for success” (p. 15). A principal who is distinguished in the Micro-Political standard understands the professional needs of his or her staff and creates strategies to establish a cohesive and collaborative learning environment. Principals and central office staff of Redwood schools shared their thoughts regarding the support that was in place and what was additionally needed to promote school administrators in this leadership strand.

Conversations with principals primarily focused on how to establish a successful culture in their buildings. They took ownership in this task and viewed it as their responsibility to acquire the support from teachers through a systematic process. Principal Price commented that,

When we’re talking about looking at support at the proficient level versus the distinguished level . . . I think that basically boils down to personal weaknesses we have as principals, personal things that maybe we’re not as good at, but we may need additional insight.

He also added that the district had confidence in principals to handle their staff. Central office relied on school administrators to seek advice when needed rather than attempt to require principals to establish a universal culture that was identical in each building.

Principal Patton interpreted the responsibilities of this standard to mean having an awareness of what her staff needs and being able to blend everyone's strengths and weaknesses. She believed that only she could be responsible for this task and that central office could serve as a model for how to approach it.

If I am to employ an awareness of staff's professional needs, use issues and interests to build cohesion, and if I'm going to learn and have the capacity to do that, then I probably need to be in a situation where I see it modeled and being done. I think modeling it by doing it as a district. I mean letting us give input on what our needs are as principals and providing us with meeting those needs as we give feedback.

Patton hoped that, in turn, principals would better understand how to elicit feedback from teachers and use this knowledge to create a culture more conducive for professional growth. This would assist principals to make progress in the performance ratings in this leadership function. Similar to supportive strategies in the External Development standard, a modeling process would provide proactive support rather than district staff needing to react to challenges that occur in a school involving cultural conflict.

Central office administrators were asked to identify how they supported principals in the Micro-Political standard and what they could do to further advance them. District staff described the challenges with helping principals in this function as an endless cycle. Admittedly, they felt that their support needed to improve in terms of assisting school administrators to build a strong professional culture. However, they often found themselves dealing with the reactionary tasks that stemmed from a lack of professional development for principals. Because many principals struggle to stay in tune with staff's needs, central office becomes involved and must respond to isolated incidents. This, in

turn, takes potential time away from district administrators that could be used to proactively address micro-political leadership strategies.

Human Resources Director, Jason Craven explained, “Central office can provide support, but it’s usually a back-ended support, it’s after the fact or in a situation where you’re in the middle of it. So it’s not necessarily a proactive support per se.” Craven was not alone in accepting responsibility. Director Sharpe added, “We have not in my estimation done a lot to move principals from proficient to distinguished in this area . . . it’s one of those things that is so time sensitive, meaning that we need to show improvement with the scores when the kids test in May.” Sharpe explained that just as principals are forced to make student performance a priority above all else, so are district administrators. This, of course, leaves standards such as micro-political leadership to become a reactionary task rather than a proactive strategy of support.

Assistant Superintendent Hooper strongly felt that professional development was needed in this area if for no other reason than for principals to realize that the district places a priority on this measure of leadership and wants to offer support. “The problem with that is . . . we often depend on principals to be able to do this themselves and that’s why we’re where we are.” Both Hooper and Sharpe believed that district administrators must make it clear to principals that, although advancing student performance is the primary goal, other functional of school leadership must be strengthened along the way. Providing a climate for a professional and collaborative staff also supports the advancement of students as learners, thus making this leadership function a priority as well.

The Evaluation Process

The SES evaluation process consists of six steps that principals and district administrators must follow throughout the course of the evaluation cycle. These steps include an orientation process, pre-evaluation planning, a meeting with the Superintendent, data collection, the preparation of a consolidated performance assessment, and a final evaluation meeting between the principal and the Superintendent or his/her designee. The last phase of the interviews required principals and central office administrators to examine the evaluation process as outlined by the SES. Principals were asked to discuss how they were supported in this process and what additional strategies were needed. Central office staff members were asked to identify the support that had been offered and to generate other helpful strategies that would assist principals.

When principals were shown the steps of the evaluation process created by the North Carolina State Board of Education, mixed reactions occurred. Some had never seen the document while others were familiar with its expectations. However, all principals commented that the Redwood School District had a current plan to evaluate principals with all steps of the process included. Although the actual document had not been used as a template, district staff members were credited for following a similar process. Most of the principals requested more information to be given from the district about these steps. Principal Nesbit believed that central office was following protocol, but “would have loved to been able to talk to somebody more often.” Principal Rogers added, “I don’t remember having any kind of orientation officially where each principal was provided a complete set of materials. I think it was just sent to us.”

The need for more feedback from the district was evident during interviews with principals. Principal Price believed that central office had confidence in school administrators to complete these tasks, but that could easily be viewed as a lack of support. “I think one of the things that we have to be careful of, is in assuming people know and understand. Just like as a principal, I can’t assume that my teachers understand their evaluation process.” The amount of constructive criticism received from district supervisors was also noted. Principal Freeze requested a more thorough rating process from her supervisors. “I don’t get a whole lot of areas for improvement, which kind of bothers me because I know that’s not true—so I don’t really glean as much from that. It’s not as reflective as I would like it to be for myself.”

Day to day support from the district was rated highly by principals, but they did not believe that their supervisors viewed the formal evaluation process as a priority. Price explained, “The turning in of your goals is going to serve as your pre-planning and your meeting, which the meeting maybe doesn’t occur, then the next thing you know, it’s March and someone comes over for an update on what’s going on with your goals.” While district personnel were credited for offering support in all leadership standards, the review of the step by step evaluation process revealed room for improvement. A final thought that was shared by Principal Patton provided insight into how developing the new SES model was in the district and what additional support was needed. “Well I’m not sure I have a thorough understanding. I mean I’m not sure I’m collecting data for every one of these areas. So I need more understanding on them.”

District administrators shared their thoughts on the support they currently offered principals and generated suggestions as to what could be done better. It was ironic that principals wanted a more focused approach on the formal process of the evaluation tool while central office staff put the priority of support on the day to day interactions with principals. Director Scott commented that daily interactions with principals benefited their success much more than a formal meeting to review one's progress.

I think there is some value in having time to digest and talk about patterns over the last few months or so. I'm not saying it's of no value, but it's the day to day interactions with principals that I think help them to grow and that day to day coaching . . . that I think help them . . . more so than any formal evaluative process.

Assistant Superintendent Hooper added, "I don't think there are any weaknesses in the steps. I think we do a pretty good job making sure we are in touch on a regular basis."

Areas to improve that were discussed by central office administrators included having honest conversations with principals about areas of concern, helping them have patience when trying to reach long-term goals, and providing clarity to principals as to where their priorities should be within the SES leadership standards. Several district supervisors explained that more feedback should be offered to principals on a more consistent basis that addressed their performance in various areas. However, the actual evaluation process and its six steps were not referenced in ideas for improvement.

Summary of Findings

Extensive interviews with selected principals and central office supervisors within the Redwood School System revealed trend data regarding supportive strategies that

assisted principals to maintain proficiency and strategies that were needed to become distinguished leaders as stated in the North Carolina School Executive Standards.

Challenges faced when attempting to provide supportive strategies also surfaced during interviews. These challenges became evident after each participant discussed the level of support that was in place or that was needed in each standard of the SES.

Findings retrieved from the interviews built a platform for implications that could potentially benefit the work of providing more support to principals in the School Executive Standards. It became clear that principals and district administrators in the Redwood County Schools worked diligently to meet the needs of their students and made strong attempts to adhere to the expectations of the SES. What emerged from the findings was the need for a more comprehensive analysis of how they do their work and what additional support could be in place to assist in this challenge. Furthermore, an identification of obstacles that interfered with the district's progress surfaced, thus allowing for an opportunity to devise solutions that would potentially remove them from view.

An attempt to compile the numerous research implications from this fieldwork shed light on the struggles that a school district can face when embracing an new evaluation model, but more so, uncovered a solutions-driven approach that may positively impact the professional growth and relationships of support that exist within a school system. Understanding the limitations of leadership is challenging work that must occur before strategies can be devised that will surpass those limitations. Research implications from the findings in the Redwood County Schools intended to address each

challenge and need with potential solutions that would enable principals and district administrators to more successfully work towards distinguished leadership.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Fieldwork completed in the Redwood County School System involved extensive interviews with selected principals and central office administrators to discover the supportive strategies needed for school leaders to maintain proficiency and become distinguished executives as stated by the North Carolina School Executive Standards (SES). The findings gathered during the interview process suggested numerous implications that assist in identifying these supportive strategies as well as the challenges administrators face when offering support.

A qualitative methodology was used to acquire my needed data. Participants in my research consisted of two groups. Central office employees and principals were interviewed from the same school district. Participants in the study covered the spectrum of experience from a first year principal to a district administrator with decades of experience. Each administrator was interviewed once for approximately 90 minutes at a predetermined setting within the district. All participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts from their interviews for member checking purposes.

Redwood County Schools had experienced academic success in the district with respectable gains in test scores and graduation rates. Although located in a rural area with high unemployment and poverty rates, the district reported significant progress made with their students.

The following research questions guided my study with all school and district administrators in the Redwood School District. Questions were asked to each participant individually and responses were analyzed for trend data. The research questions are followed by an overview of implications that attempt to identify means of viable support for principals.

Research Questions

1. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do principals say that they need to be proficient school leaders?
2. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do district administrators say should be offered to principals to be proficient school leaders?
3. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do principals say that they need to be distinguished school leaders?
4. Given a new set of performance standards, what support do district administrators say should be offered to principals to become distinguished school leaders?
5. What do principals say they need from district administration during the actual evaluation process of the new set of standards?
6. What do district administrators say principals need during the actual evaluation process of the new set of standards?

Overview of Implications

A significant challenge that all principals and district personnel faced during the interviews was establishing a disparity between supportive strategies that allowed for proficient ratings as opposed to those strategies that would allow for distinguished leadership ratings. Both groups of participants understood how leadership tasks could be handled more efficiently and more collaboratively, but these ideas for improvement that were recorded during the interviews did not always correlate to the performance ratings and their description in the SES framework. In many instances, central office supervisors were providing support to assist principals in their advancement of various leadership functions. However, this was not being done as prescriptively as the SES model may have intended. Principals and district staff generated ideas that would help school leaders do a better job, but these strategies did not reference the specific qualities of leadership needed to be distinguished as stated in the SES. The actual definitions of what proficient and distinguished leadership actually meant greatly varied among participants.

Strategies of support that were requested by principals and were admittedly needed by district administrators frequently bounced back and forth between the allowance for autonomy in some leadership standards and the need for more focused district involvement in other standards. For example, participants believed that managerial and cultural leadership strands required principals to have autonomous reign in their schools in order to reach a distinguished level of success. However, the discussion of instructional and human resource leadership standards prompted a need for central office to provide intensive professional development and specific strategies that

principals could implement. The requested types of support from principals also varied based on the amount of experience each had in their role or in their current assignment. Some needed more direct support from the district while others only needed their supervisors for confirmation of their decisions. An individualized method of support for each school leader emerged as a solution to address principals' diverse needs.

Reactive support versus proactive support proved to be a battle that district staff faced when assisting principals to make progress in each leadership strand. While some instances called for reactionary measures, such as speaking with a parent that disagreed with the principal's decision on a disciplinary matter, directors and cabinet members of central office admitted that proactive support was difficult to provide to principals due to the daily grind of their responsibilities. The need for professional development and opportunities for PLC's (Professional Learning Communities) frequently were noted by principals as additional strategies of support. Supervisors agreed that this was needed, but also confessed that daily interactions with principals regarding individual incidents absorbed the majority of their time.

Proactive support was noted to be dominant in the instructional leadership strand, leaving other leadership functions an afterthought for support. A clear focus was placed on instructional improvement and increased student performance in the district. Principals and supervisors spoke highly of their accomplishments to have a strategic and well supported plan of action that benefitted instructional progress. However, the SES involved a plethora of expectations throughout seven standards. Interviews exposed the need for a more balanced support system in the district to meet these expectations of each

standard. While principals and supervisors both realized this need, both groups also understood the need for an instructional focus and why this could not be compromised due to state and federal mandates. Since this would not change, providing proactive means of support in other leadership strands that would promote distinguished ratings became a formidable task set forth by the North Carolina State Board of Education.

The evaluation process of the SES provides six explicit steps that school and district leaders should follow throughout an academic year. These can be viewed as formal in that a timeline and order of events are offered as well as a description of how each step should take place. Principals in the Redwood School System expressed a desire for clarification of this process and more input from supervisors as each step takes place. District officials believed that more authentic support of principals is acquired through daily interactions and informal conversations regarding leadership challenges. Although supervisors did agree that more support should be put in place to clarify the process, its formality was not viewed as a necessity to make leadership improvements. Again, district support was clearly documented as being in place, but not as prescriptively as suggested by the SES evaluation process. This challenge of following a formal process of evaluation versus the reliance of daily interactions of support to advance principals was present in the district. A balance of both strategies would need to be implemented to meet the requested needs of principals and to continue the ongoing supportive interactions already in place.

Discovering strategies of support that enable principals to become distinguished leaders uncovered many challenges that district administrators face during this process.

The actual strategies that were identified during the interviews cannot be successfully offered to principals until these challenges are addressed and resolved collaboratively by all leaders within the district.

The intended outcomes of the conceptual framework used throughout this study involved identifying systematic support from central office that benefited principals' professional growth, creating viable relationships that could be sustained between principals and district staff, and establishing varied levels of support that principals would need based on their current performance ratings in each leadership standard of the SES. The data collection process combined with the conceptual framework outcomes produced seven research implications that assist in discovering strategies of support to build distinguished school executives.

1. Proficient vs. Distinguished—Clarification of Performance Ratings
2. Professional Development by Standard
3. Individualized Support
4. Focus on Student Achievement
5. Formality vs. Informality—The Evaluation Process
6. Communication of Responses
7. Alignment of District Support

Proficient vs. Distinguished—Clarification of Performance Ratings

Before meaningful and sustainable support can be asked for or offered, principals and central office administrators must clearly understand the performance expectations for proficient and distinguished leadership and how they differ. The SES is a standards-

driven evaluation system that differentiates levels of leadership success with specific actions for each performance rating. While the rubric was provided to each principal and district supervisor who was interviewed, it was evident that the SES model was not only new, but also challenging to understand.

Both school and district leaders often referred to supportive strategies as “good” and “great” when referencing proficient and distinguished levels of performance as well as the levels of support offered. Although these words were never indicated as performance ratings in the SES, they felt comfortable contrasting proficient and distinguished in this manner. All of whom were interviewed clearly understood the purpose of the seven leadership standards and how each played a significant role in their job responsibilities. However, the specific actions and their characteristics that could propel one from a proficient rating to distinguished were not easily identified.

A lack of clarity of the performance ratings of the SES was a significant implication that emerged from the research. In order for principals to truly become distinguished school executives in each leadership strand, they, as well as central office leaders, must be able to identify these defining traits. In relation to the purpose of the research, how principals could be better supported in the SES initially meant the need for professional development opportunities that clarified the performance ratings for each function. This learning opportunity was also needed for district staff, as admittedly, they were not affluent with the evaluation rubric.

If principals and district personnel are to work together to build sustainable support that produces professional growth, both parties must understand the end goals of

leadership success that is currently determined by the SES. Since the descriptions of “proficient” and “distinguished” provided during the interviews varied, a common goal for principals to reach with precise strategies of support offered became a daunting task. This is not to say that the Redwood School System did not have a plan of action in place to support principals. The district simply had not been provided the tools needed from the creators of the SES to appropriately understand its rubric for evaluation. Further research could stem from this fieldwork that investigates the network of support from the state entities to school districts regarding North Carolina’s new standards for school administrators.

Nevertheless, principals and central office staff offered valuable input on what strategies of support were valuable to their leadership growth and what more could be done to advance principals as leaders. Although ideas did not always correlate to the specific rubric of the SES evaluation, these thoughts clearly benefited the potential improvement of administrative relationships and sustainable supportive strategies.

Professional Development by Standard

Beyond the need for clarification of the actual performance ratings was the need for professional development opportunities by individual leadership standard that comprised the SES. Findings revealed the need for principals to collaborate with their colleagues and seek advice from the district in a formal setting such as a Professional Learning Community, or PLC. District administrators also agreed that time spent on individual standards could prove to be valuable in terms of a better understanding and better implementation of each strand by school administrators.

Interviews with Redwood County principals indicated that performing at distinguished levels in each standard was an isolating task that could be better accomplished through collegial support. Combining all ideas, strategies, tools of support, and resources into one package from central office to address the SES standards as a whole, rather than individually, was not viewed a successful approach to accomplish distinguished leadership. Monthly administrative meetings were noted to be helpful to principals since updates were consistently given by central office to “rally the troops.” However, many of the leadership functions expected for principals to perform were clearly not a focus for learning during these meetings. Primarily, the research concluded that professional development opportunities that are aligned with SES expectations were not as readily available to Redwood principals as they would prefer. Feedback from school administrators also called for professional development to be individualized by standard and to be allowed time to collaborate with others in their roles in order to share success stories.

District administrators conferred with school principals that more opportunities for growth by individual SES standard would assist school executives to become distinguished leaders. The challenge to provide this setting revolved around finding time to do so and having to react to leadership issues at hand rather than proactively developing principals within all areas. Waters and Kingston (2005) described this challenge as a “dilemma facing school leaders . . . to assure that all important responsibilities are fulfilled, while focusing on what is essential to student achievement, which is compounded by the fact that urgency frequently trumps what is important in

schools” (p. 36). The analogy of building a plane while flying it seems appropriate when comparing the task that school and district leaders face to handle daily issues with fidelity while continually growing in all aspects of the profession.

It is important to note that Redwood district administrators frequently met with principals as a whole group in monthly meetings and provided opportunities to individually meet with principals on an ongoing basis. Principals were complimentary of this outreach and access to district guidance. Ramifications for improvement lay in the creation of a systematic professional development process that strived to offer the building of leadership capacity by individual leadership standard.

The potential for further exploration exists to identify the most appropriate and efficient professional development approaches that address the expectations of the SES by individual leadership strand. There are potential implications for district administrators as well as preparatory programs for principals that contribute to the ongoing support needed by school administrators to exhibit the desired distinguished qualities of the new evaluation tool.

Individualized Support

“One size fits all” is far from true when considering the professional development needs of school administrators. Although not directly expressed by any principal or central office supervisor during the interviews, an implication for individualized support for each principal was revealed. As each participant was guided through the seven standards and evaluation process with a focus on the guiding research questions, it was evident that not all principals were at the same performance level or even comfort level

within each standard. While a seasoned principal expressed content with the district's support in a specific strand, a beginning principal may have requested more guidance in the same area. Furthermore, an experienced principal who had recently moved to another school within the district had different needs than one who had remained in the same school for numerous years. There was certainly agreement noted among all principals regarding overall support that was needed to assist their advancement. However, individual conversations about individual leadership standards created a need for individualized support from the district.

Interviews with district staff did not allow for individual principal's strengths and areas of weaknesses to be discussed. Generally speaking, central office supervisors were well aware that all principals required different strategies of support based on factors of school placement, experience, and individual leadership styles. Although the district's awareness of individual principal's needs was evident, the challenge became providing individualized support based on those needs. Just as teachers are expected to differentiate instruction based on student's learning styles, the same challenge exists for district leaders when providing support to principals who aspire to distinguished levels within the SES.

Research findings indicate that there are more individual needs from school principals than available resources of support from the district. As expressed by the Superintendent of Redwood, budget cuts easily translate into less support and resources. During this current era of economic recession, Redwood County Schools have been expected to do more with less. Specifically, school allotments and funds were left intact

while district level allocations experienced a significant reduction. This, of course, further stretches the ability of district staff to individually recognize and provide support for each principal's area of need. Shortages of time, money, and appropriate staff at central office can justify the current method of whole group presentations on a monthly basis rather than professional development by leadership standard or by an assessment of an individual principal's areas of improvement. Regardless, this study revealed the need for these adjustments regarding supportive strategies that could benefit the growth of school administrators.

A possible implication for further thought could reside with central office restructuring to better align with and offer support in each leadership standard of the SES. Current research exists that attempts to identify how this individualized support could be implemented. Kevin Butler (2008) discussed the idea of coaches that served principals within their precise areas of need. He found that "coaches . . . are more likely to be confided in by new principals who might be reluctant to share problems with somebody inside the district out of fear of embarrassment or looking incompetent" (p. 68). With the currently adopted standards-driven evaluation system for principals, it is reasonable to propose an alignment of resources and support to match the desired outcomes set forth by each leadership function. Portin et al. (2003) stated, "Principals are responsible for ensuring that leadership happens in all seven critical areas, but they don't have to provide it on their own" (p. 25). This is a powerful statement from the related research that supports the need for individualized principal support.

Focus on Student Achievement

An imbalance of focus among the seven leadership standards emerged from the research completed in the Redwood County Schools. There was an evident urgency placed on instructional leadership more so than any other standard. This was clearly believed to be true by both principals and central office staff. The Accountability model each school strives to reach bared most of the blame for this uneven distribution of focus. School and system recognition within the North Carolina ABC model and the federal AYP model require significant importance to be placed on the continual improvement of student performance shown through summative test scores.

According to author and principal Pamela Brown (2006), the role of a school administrator far surpasses the sole responsibility of meeting set accountability goals. “Although NCLB has become a driving force behind accountability efforts, the daily challenges faced by school leaders encompass far more than meeting requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress” (p. 526). Based on the responses from both principals and district administrators, neither group within the Redwood School System is to blame for this disproportionate focus. Both parties were well aware of the potential sanctions from the state and federal levels if academic goals were not met. Principals and district staff also placed a priority on student achievement, as this was frequently described as the core business of their profession.

The discussion of other leadership functions in the SES and what additional support is needed and can be offered towards distinguished performance alluded to the overbearing focus on instructional improvement. That is not to say that support was

absent in other strands, but not as well aligned to principal's needs in these areas. A prime example of extraordinary efforts in Redwood to advance instructional leadership was the CASA model, or Collaboration Around Student Achievement. The district had gone to great lengths to involve all principals and teachers in this initiative that intended to better inform the district about best instructional practices through a collaborative network. Each of those interviewed spoke fluently about this process and there was consistency with their comments of value towards the district's mission.

An organized effort such as CASA not only indicates the priority for instructional leadership, but also reveals a contrast in priority for other leadership standards. It could be implied that instructional leadership could be further strengthened by a balanced support system in place for other leadership strands within the SES. Managerial and cultural leadership along with the human resource and strategic strands could all potentially benefit the work of instructional improvement if principals demonstrate distinguished traits in these areas.

McREL referred to these responsibilities as a balanced leadership framework. Dr. Waters and his team (2003) deemed these to positively affect student achievement when consistently in place. Specifically, each responsibility has leadership practices that, if in place, will foster the change needed to promote student achievement. Research findings from the Redwood County Schools align with McREL's balanced leadership framework and justify a need for a more equitable support structure regarding the SES (see Figure 8).

Culture	Order	Discipline	Resources	Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment	Focus	Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment
Visibility	Contingent Rewards	Communication	Outreach	Input	Affirmation	Relationship

Figure 8. McRel’s Balanced Leadership Framework

Formality vs. Informality—The Evaluation Process

The SES evaluation process includes six defined steps that principals and district staff must follow throughout the school year. Several of these steps require interactive meetings between each principal and the superintendent or a designee. Interviews with both groups signaled that the actual process as prescribed by the state became more informal than what was intended. Principals expressed the need for these steps to become more valuable experiences towards their growth while district staff explained its implementation as more informal interactions that occurred frequently throughout the year. Similar to the study conducted by Kimball et al. (2009), a formative approach of support emerged as the district’s strategy to interact with principals within the standards-driven model.

Principals appreciated the support received from central office on an ongoing basis. Evidence of frequent check-ins, phone calls, and visits from district staff were apparent and a productive relationship between both groups seemed to be in place. When asked to speak to the support need from their supervisors to fulfill the responsibilities of the SES evaluation process, formal adherence to the six step process was desired. Admittedly, some principals interviewed had never seen the actual framework of the

process. That did not mean that support was insufficient from the district, but simply not offered in the format provided through the SES.

The informality of the evaluation process can be viewed as purposeful on the part of central office in an attempt to make it a reflective learning process. Supervisors of principals found it more meaningful to frequently and informally check in with school administrators regarding their progress. The formality of the process as outlined by the SES limited interactions throughout the year and ended with a formal evaluation with the superintendent that may or may not be a surprise in terms of performance.

Data collected from principals and supervisors indicate a need for a balance of support that encompasses informal and formal approaches of interaction in relation to the evaluation process. A possible separation of these approaches may be most appropriate in order to preserve the sanctity of the formal evaluation process while still keeping a sense of collaborative support and reflection through informal interactions. This would imply that more steps would need to be taken to solidify the six step process in Redwood as outlined by the SES in order to avoid confusion as to the purpose of informal conversations.

Communication of Responses

It is important to note that responses given in the interviews by principals and central office staff should be shared with each other. While some strategies of support were similar between the groups, many were not. It is likely that the opportunity to share such responses has not been available to either party given the fact the SES are a new entity not only in Redwood but across the state. If the intention is to better inform the

district about what principals say they need to become distinguished, the district needs to be aware of principals' concerns and requests. Likewise, principals need to be aware of the reasoning for decisions made at the district level and the purpose of the supportive strategies already in place.

On a grander scale, the sharing of principals' needs and the strategies of the district to meet them have potentially substantial implications for any school district that intends to build capacity for distinguished school executives. Although simplistic in nature, providing a setting for school administrators and central office staff to exchange concerns, success stories, and to collaboratively identify strategies of support emerged as a primary answer to the research questions that guided the study.

Alignment of District Support

Similar to most districts, the central offices of Redwood County Schools are comprised of numerous directors and cabinet members that facilitate various aspects of educational leadership to school administrators. The complexity of their work requires a focus on specific departmental tasks while still remaining as visionaries for the mission of the district. This balance was noted as a challenge during interviews with principals and central office staff.

Honig et al. (2010) proposed four strategies of support that could potentially assist central office leaders to provide consistent and aligned support. One of these approaches called for the elimination of overlap regarding communication processes from the district to principals. School administrators in Redwood spoke highly of the support received, but inconsistencies were noted in regards to the new evaluation tool. As with any new

initiative, a learning curve is present and those expected to overcome it will often interpret ideas differently from each other. In the case of the SES, a lack of preparation and clarification from the state level did not assist matters and left Redwood district administrators to make their own interpretation of the tool.

Principals experienced unintentional overlap of support from their supervisors in the district. Interviews documented that central support staff were all responsive to principals' needs, but the priority of focus varied from each supervisor. Departmental focus often drove conversations between district and school administrators. This is understandable, since directors and assistant superintendents are assigned to specific areas to oversee and they are challenged to live and breathe in those arenas.

A call for more aligned and agreed upon priorities at the district level that is consistently received at the school level is an implication for further research from this study. As explained by Knuth and Banks (2006), "The success rate of principals can be improved with intentional application of a practical framework that establishes a common language for effective school leadership; that makes explicit an order of operations for prioritizing leadership tasks . . ." (p. 4). The SES is just one of many mandates sent from the State Board of Education that district leaders must understand, interpret, and implement within their school system. As these initiatives become more complex, so do the strategies that will be needed to support school administrators. It is evident that responsibilities for central office staff and principals are overflowing. A restructuring of how communication occurs between the two parties and what is chosen as priorities of focus may be needed to advance distinguished school executives.

Conclusion

The principalship has been and always will be a complex profession. As standards and expectations change, so do the attempts to better identify how principals can be supported. This study intended to contribute to this discovery process by uncovering the challenges faced by principals in one school district while also brainstorming solutions to those obstacles. School and district leaders provided candid input to all aspects of their jobs and paid intensive consideration to each leadership function in the School Executive Standards while doing so. The implications for further support that were extrapolated from the study could be deemed beneficial to the continued collaborative work within the district.

Future Research

Opportunities for continued research exist after this study. The implications identified deserve significant attention in future attempts to devise an action plan of support for school administrators. Since numerous strategies have been identified, there is monumental work left to do regarding the implementation of these strategies within school districts. Case studies that document implementation success could potentially serve as a format for universal support across all systems that use the School Executive Standards to evaluate and professionally grow principals.

The National Staff Development Council through its Learning Forward initiative focuses on professional learning opportunities for all educators. The council's website explains:

Increasing the effectiveness of professional learning is the leverage point with the greatest potential for strengthening and refining the day-to-day performance of educators. For most educators working in schools, professional learning is the singular most accessible means they have to develop the new knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to better meet students' learning needs . . . Increased educator effectiveness makes possible a shift from current reality to the preferred outcomes of enhanced student learning results—a goal to which all educators subscribe.

Solutions for improving support to principals will require an ongoing commitment to professional development for both school and district leaders. Principals' effectiveness to lead as distinguished executives will rely upon the sharing of ideas, communication of needs with the district, and a continued capacity for professional growth. District administrators must align their mission of support and communicate their mission consistently if principals are to make progress expected by the School Executive Standards.

The research implications that emerged from fieldwork in the Redwood County Schools can serve as a launching pad for further inquiries regarding professional learning opportunities for principals and central office administrators as they collaboratively attempt to strengthen the leadership ability of their school systems. In addition, a framework for consistent and effective administrative support within a school district could be further investigated beyond the implications outlined. The successful implementation of the strategies documented to better support school leaders will require substantial research to assess long-term effectiveness and the impact had on advancing principals to distinguished levels of leadership.

REFERENCES

- Brown, P. (2006). Educating leaders for tomorrow: A forum; Preparing principals for today's demands. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(7), 525–526.
- Brubaker, D. (2004). *Creative Curriculum Leadership: Inspiring and Empowering Your School Community*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Burrello, L., Lashley, C., & Beatty, E. (2001). *Educating all students together: How school leaders create unified systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Butler, K. (2008, September 1). Principal preparation programs: Equipping school leaders for new pressures and challenges. *District Administration*, 66–70.
- Charlotte Advocates for Education. (2004). *Role of principal leadership in increasing teacher retention: Creating a supportive environment*. Charlotte, NC: Author.
- Coble, L., Clodfelter, M., & Brubaker, D. (2007). *Strategies for Your Improvement: A Developmental Guide for Educational Leaders Utilizing 360 Degrees Feedback*. Greensboro, NC: On Track.
- Cuban, L. (1988). *The managerial imperative and the practice of leadership in schools*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Doscher, S., & Normore, A. (2008). The moral agency of the educational leader in times of national crisis and conflict. *Journal of School Leadership*, 1, 8–31.
- Duncan, A. (2010). *National Association of Elementary School Principals*. Retrieved from <http://www.naesp.org>

- Fallon, D. (2005). *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high quality new teachers*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.
- Greenfield, T., & Ribbins, P. (1993). *Greenfield on educational administration: Towards a human science*. London. Routledge Press.
- Honig, M., Copland, M., Rainey, L., Lorton, J., & Newton, M. (2010). *Central office transformation for district-wide teaching and learning improvement*. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. University of Washington.
- Johnson, P., & Chrispeels, J. (2010, October). Linking the central office and its schools for reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(5), 738–775.
- Kimball, S., Milanowski, A., & McKinney, S. (2009). Assessing the promise of standards-based performance evaluation for principals: Results from a randomized trial. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8(3), 233–263.
- Knuth, R., & Banks, P. (2006). The Essential Leadership Model. *NASSP Bulletin*, 90(1), 4–18.
- Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Leone, S., Warnimont, C., & Zimmerman, J. (2009). New roles for the principal of the future. *American Secondary Education*, 37(2), 86–96.
- Maryland State Board of Education. (2005). *Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework*.
- National Policy Board for Educational Administration, (2008). *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008*.

National Staff Development Council. (n. d.). Retrieved March, 2012, from

<http://www.learningforward.org/standards/index.cfm>

North Carolina State Board of Education. (2006). North Carolina Standards for School

Executives: Future Ready Students for the 21st Century. [Online]. Available:

<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/humanresources/district-personnel/evaluation/standardsadmin.pdf>

North Carolina State Board of Education, and Mid-continent Research for Education

Learning. (2008). North Carolina school executive: Principal evaluation process.

[Online]. Available: <http://www.ncpapa.org/forms/Evaluation%20Instrument.pdf>

Portin, B., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M., & Gundlach, L. (2003). *Making sense of*

leading schools: A study of the school principalship. Seattle: Center on

Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington.

Reeves, D. (2006). *The learning leader: How to focus school improvement for better*

results. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Schlechty, P. (2002). *Working on the work: An action plan for teachers, principals, and*

superintendents. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in*

teaching and learning. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and

Curriculum Development.

Southern Regional Education Board. (2009). *The district leadership challenge:*

Empowering principals to improve teaching and learning. [Online]. Available:

<http://www.sreb.org>

- Southern Regional Education Board. (2001). *The principal internship: How can we get it right?* [Online]. Available: <http://www.sreb.org>
- Southern Regional Education Board. (2010). *The three essentials: Improving schools requires district vision, district and state support, and principal leadership.* [Online]. Available: <http://www.sreb.org>
- Waters, T. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement.* Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Waters, T., & Grubb, S. (2004a). *Leading schools: Distinguishing the essential from the important.* Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Waters, T., & Grubb, S. (2004b). *The leadership we need: Using research to strengthen the use of standards for administrator preparation and licensure program.* Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Waters, T., & Kingston, S. (2005, September/October). The standards we need: A comparative analysis of performance standards shows us what is essential for principals to know and be able to do to improve achievement. *Leadership*, 35(1), 14-16.
- West, D., Peck, C., & Reitzug, U. (2010). Limited control and relentless accountability: Examining historical changes in urban school principal pressure. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20, 238–266.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT VISUAL OF SCHOOL EXECUTIVE STANDARDS

North Carolina School Executive Standards: Comparison of Performance Ratings	
Proficient	Principal demonstrated basic competence on standards of performance.
Distinguished	Principal consistently and significantly exceeded basic competence on standards of performance.

Standard 1: Strategic Leadership	Principals will create conditions that result in strategically re-imaging the school's vision, mission, and goals in the 21st century. Understanding that schools ideally prepare students for an unseen but not all together unpredictable future, the leader creates a climate of inquiry that challenges the school community to continually re-purpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway to reach it.
Indicators	School vision, mission, and strategic goals.
	Leading change
	School improvement plans
	Distributive leadership

Standard 2: Strategic Leadership	Principals set high standards for the professional practice of 21 st century instruction and assessment that result in a no-nonsense accountable environment. The school executive must be knowledgeable of best instructional practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school for the design of highly engaging schoolwork for students, the on-going peer review of this work, and the sharing of the work throughout the professional community.
Indicators	Focus on learning, teaching, curriculum, instruction, and assessment
	Focus on instructional time

Standard 3: Strategic Leadership	Principals will understand the role that a school's culture plays in contributing to the exemplary performance of the school. Principals must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and the community that results in a sense of pride upon which to build a positive future. A principal must be able to "re-culture" the school if needed to align with the school's goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of adults and students with passion, meaning and purpose. Cultural leadership implies understanding the school and people in it each day, how they came to their current state, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school's efforts to achieve individual and collective goals.
Indicators	Focus on collaborative work environment
	School culture and identity
	Acknowledges failures; celebrates accomplishments and rewards
	Efficacy and empowerment

Standard 4: Strategic Leadership	Principals will ensure that the school is a professional learning community. Principals will ensure that the process and systems are in place which results in recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development, and retention of high performing staff. The principal must engage and empower accomplished teachers in a distributive manner, including support of teachers in day-to-day decisions such as discipline, communication with parents/guardians, and protecting teachers from duties that interfere with teaching, and must practice fair and consistent evaluations of teachers. The principal must engage teachers and others professional staff in conversations to plan their career paths and support district succession planning.
Indicators	Professional development/learning communities Recruiting, hiring, placing and mentoring of staff Teacher and staff evaluation
Standard 5: Strategic Leadership	Principals will ensure that the school has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, problem-solving, communicating expectations and scheduling that result in organizing the work routines in the building. The principal must be responsible for the monitoring of the school budget and the inclusion of all teachers in the budget decision so as to meet the 21st century needs of every classroom. Effectively and efficiently managing the complexity of every day life is critical for staff to be able to focus its energy on improvement.
Indicators	School resources and budget Conflict management and resolution Systematic communication School expectations for students and staff
Standard 6: Strategic Leadership	The principal will design structures and processes that result in community engagement, support, and ownership. Acknowledges that schools no longer reflect but, in fact, build community, the leader proactively creates with staff, opportunities for parents/guardians, community and business representatives to participate as “stockholders” in the school such that continued investment of resources and good will are not left to chance.
Indicators	Parent and community involvement and outreach Federal, state, and district mandates
Standard 7: Strategic Leadership	Principals will build systems and relationships that utilize the staff’s diversity, encourage constructive ideological conflict in order to leverage staff expertise, power, and influence in order to realize the school’s vision for success. The principal will also creatively employ an awareness of staff’s professional needs, issues, and interests to build cohesion and to facilitate distributed governance and shared decision-making.
Indicators	School executive micro-political leadership

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL EVALUATION PROCESS

Instructions for Principal Evaluation Process

The intended purpose of the principal evaluation process is to focus on formative professional development in a collegial, non-threatening way to assess the principal's performance in relation to the Standards for School Executives. The principal will take the lead in conducting the evaluation process throughout the use of self-assessment, reflection and by gathering input from the various stakeholders with an interest in the leadership in the school. The input and evidence gathered by the principal is **not** intended to become part of a portfolio. Rather, it should provide a basis for self-assessment, goal-setting, professional development, and demonstration of performance on specific standards. The following outlines the principal evaluation process.

Step 1: Orientation

At the beginning of the school year the superintendent/designee conducts a group orientation with all of the district principals. At this orientation, each principal will be provided a complete set of materials outlining the evaluation process.

Step 2: Pre-Evaluation Planning

Principals will, individually and without input from anyone else, complete a self-assessment using NC School Executive: Principal Evaluation Rubric. This self-assessment will serve as the basis for the preliminary goals form, which should be completed prior to Step 3.

Step 3: Meeting with Superintendent/Designee

Principals will meet individually with the district superintendent or a designee who has been delegated this responsibility to discuss the results of self evaluation, preliminary performance goals and the evidence and data to be gathered for the evaluation process. The principal and superintendent will agree on the data, evidence, and artifacts necessary to complete the evaluation process and confirm the principal's level of performance.

Step 4: Data Collection

The principal will collect the data agreed upon in step 3. This data may include the artifacts listed for each standard on the rubric: feedback from parents, students, and the school community; document of professional development completed during the year; and other data to document achievement of performance goals. The district superintendent/designee will visit the school during this period in order to observe the environment and interact with teachers and other members of the school community.

Step 5: Prepare a Consolidated Performance Assessment

The principal will synthesize the information obtained under Step 4 in order to prepare a consolidated assessment, or comprehensive view of performance throughout the year. This brief summary of the data and artifacts used to judge performance should be provided to the superintendent/designee well in advance of the performance discussed at which final performance levels will be discussed.

Step 6: Meeting Between Principal and Superintendent/Designee

The principal and superintendent/designee will meet at the school to discuss progress in completing the evaluation process. They will discuss the self-assessment, consolidated assessment, and superintendent's summary evaluation of the principal, which have been prepared in advance of the meeting. Should additional data or artifacts need to be brought into the discussion, the principal will have them readily available to share at

that time. At this meeting, the principal and superintendent/designee will agree upon performance goals and recommendations for the Professional Growth Plan.

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL AND CENTRAL OFFICE INTERVIEW MATRICES

Principal Interview: Proficient Matrix		
Leadership Functions:	Referenced In Interview?	Notes:
Strategic Leadership		
School Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals		
Leading Change		
School Improvement Plans		
Distributive Leadership		
Instructional Leadership		
Focus on Learning, Teaching, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment		
Focus on Instructional Time		
Cultural Leadership		
Focus on Collaborative Work Environment		
School Culture and Identity		
Acknowledges Failures/Celebrates Accomplishments and Rewards		
Efficacy and Empowerment		
Human Resource Leadership		
Professional Development/Learning Communities		
Recruiting, Hiring, Placing and Mentoring of Staff		
Teacher and Staff Evaluation		
Managerial Leadership		
School Resources and Budget		
Conflict Management and Resolution		
Systematic Communication		
School Expectations for School and Staff		
External Development Leadership		
Parent and Community Involvement and Outreach		
Federal, State and District Mandates		
Micro-political Leadership		
School Executive Micro-political Leadership		

Principal Interview: Distinguished Matrix		
Leadership Functions:	Referenced In Interview?	Notes:
Strategic Leadership		
School Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals		
Leading Change		
School Improvement Plans		
Distributive Leadership		
Instructional Leadership		
Focus on Learning, Teaching, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment		
Focus on Instructional Time		
Cultural Leadership		
Focus on Collaborative Work Environment		
School Culture and Identity		
Acknowledges Failures/Celebrates Accomplishments and Rewards		
Efficacy and Empowerment		
Human Resource Leadership		
Professional Development/Learning Communities		
Recruiting, Hiring, Placing and Mentoring of Staff		
Teacher and Staff Evaluation		
Managerial Leadership		
School Resources and Budget		
Conflict Management and Resolution		
Systematic Communication		
School Expectations for School and Staff		
External Development Leadership		
Parent and Community Involvement and Outreach		
Federal, State and District Mandates		
Micro-political Leadership		
School Executive Micro-political Leadership		

Central Office Interview: Proficient Matrix		
Leadership Functions:	Referenced In Interview?	Notes:
Strategic Leadership		
School Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals		
Leading Change		
School Improvement Plans		
Distributive Leadership		
Instructional Leadership		
Focus on Learning, Teaching, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment		
Focus on Instructional Time		
Cultural Leadership		
Focus on Collaborative Work Environment		
School Culture and Identity		
Acknowledges Failures/Celebrates Accomplishments and Rewards		
Efficacy and Empowerment		
Human Resource Leadership		
Professional Development/Learning Communities		
Recruiting, Hiring, Placing and Mentoring of Staff		
Teacher and Staff Evaluation		
Managerial Leadership		
School Resources and Budget		
Conflict Management and Resolution		
Systematic Communication		
School Expectations for School and Staff		
External Development Leadership		
Parent and Community Involvement and Outreach		
Federal, State and District Mandates		
Micro-political Leadership		
School Executive Micro-political Leadership		

Central Office Interview: Distinguished Matrix		
Leadership Functions:	Referenced In Interview?	Notes:
Strategic Leadership		
School Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals		
Leading Change		
School Improvement Plans		
Distributive Leadership		
Instructional Leadership		
Focus on Learning, Teaching, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment		
Focus on Instructional Time		
Cultural Leadership		
Focus on Collaborative Work Environment		
School Culture and Identity		
Acknowledges Failures/Celebrates Accomplishments and Rewards		
Efficacy and Empowerment		
Human Resource Leadership		
Professional Development/Learning Communities		
Recruiting, Hiring, Placing and Mentoring of Staff		
Teacher and Staff Evaluation		
Managerial Leadership		
School Resources and Budget		
Conflict Management and Resolution		
Systematic Communication		
School Expectations for School and Staff		
External Development Leadership		
Parent and Community Involvement and Outreach		
Federal, State and District Mandates		
Micro-political Leadership		
School Executive Micro-political Leadership		